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Judges, Ruth and Samuel

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CHAPTER I.

BOCHIM, OR THE CAUSE OF SPIRITUAL FAILURE

"And they called the name of the place Bochim"
(Judg. ii. 5).

THE Book of Judges has a very important place in the plan of divine revelation.

It expresses a truth of great importance, and a lesson of deep and solemn moment, namely, the danger of spiritual declension after great spiritual blessing.

A LONG DECLENSION.

The Book of Numbers is a sad book, for it tells of the wanderings of Israel in the wilderness for forty years after God took them out of the land of Egypt. But the Book of Judges is a far more sad and solemn book, for it tells of the failure of Israel after they had entered the land of Promise, a failure that lasted not forty years, but four hundred years. It tells us of the danger of backsliding after we have

received the Holy Ghost and known Jesus in His fulness, a danger most real and alarming. It is against this danger that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews so often and so solemnly warns the believers to whom that epistle was addressed, and bids them "give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end."

There is a place in the discipline of Christian life and the wise and faithful dealing of God with His people for both warning and promise, for both hope and fear. No one is so unsafe as he who recklessly dreams of safety without vigilance and obedience. God has planted beacons all along the way, not to discourage us with needless fear, but to save us by wholesome caution and vigilant obedience.

This book stands in a larger sense for the declension of the Church of Christ after the apostolic age, and it well represents the Dark Ages of Christian history; but in its individual application, it may also represent the danger in our personal Christian life, of going back even from the very baptism of Pentecost and the deepest and highest experiences of the Holy Ghost.

BEGAN WITH VICTORY.

The story of Judges begins with a record of victory. "Now after the death of Joshua it came to pass that the people asked the Lord, saying, Who shall go up against the Canaanites to fight against them? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up; behold I have delivered the land into his hand. And Judah said unto Simeon, his brother, Come up with me unto my lot that we may fight against the Canaanites; and I will likewise go with thee into thy lot. So Simeon went with him. And Judah went up, and the Lord delivered the Canaanites and Perizzites into their hand."

This was all as it should be, and manifested the spirit of faith, obedience, and humble dependence upon God. A little farther on we read that they even took Jerusalem, and they captured Hebron and other strongholds, and they pressed down to the country of the Philistines, and drove their enemies from most of their strongholds. It seemed as if they still possessed the victorious faith of Joshua, and had in their midst the same Almighty Presence of their divine Leader.

BEGINNING OF FAILURE.

But soon we begin to see the first indications of the coming failure. First of all, Judah begins to pause in his career of triumph, and we read the first word of defeat and discouragement. (Chapter i. verse 19.) "He could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron." Soon after we read of the partial failure of Benjamin, "And the children of Benjamin did not drive out the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but the Jebusites dwelt with the children of Benjamin in Jerusalem, unto this day." It was not "could not," now, but "did not."

Next we find Manasseh failing to drive out the inhabitants of Bethshean and the neighboring towns. "But the Canaanites would dwell in that land." (Verse 27.) Next Ephraim becomes discouraged, and fails to drive the Canaanites from Gezer. (Verse 29.) Zebulun also allows the enemy to remain in his town. (Verse 30.) Asher yields to the inhabitants of Zidon and his cities; Naphtali fails to drive out the inhabitants of Bethshemesh. (Verse 33.) And Dan flees before the Amor-

ites of his mountain land. So that there was scarcely a tribe of Israel that had not in some degree compromised with the enemy, and given place to their foes whom God had sent them to completely extirpate from the land.

The steps of their failure are very striking as we follow them in detail.

TOLERATING THE ENEMY.

First. They simply *let* the enemy remain. They seemed to have had no fear of them, and just failed to completely exterminate them. Next, however, we find them deliberately putting them under tribute, and keeping them there for the purpose of making gain of them, and getting something out of them. This is where the world gets in in our modern Christian life. We make terms with evil; we not only allow it, but we use it. We think there is no harm in taking the money of wicked men for religious objects, and meeting them half way. We are willing to be agreeable to the world in order to have a good influence over it, and we end by falling completely under its power. Next we find the Canaanites dwelling with Israel (chapter i. 27) ; but a little later we

find Israel dwelling with the Canaanites (iii. 5 and i. 33). Israel begins by treating the Canaanites as guests and tributaries, and ends by finding them masters and conquerors.

CONQUERED BY THE ENEMY.

Next we see the Canaanites driving the children of Dan into the mountains. They now have grown strong enough to dictate and demand, as evil always does, after we have given it standing room for a little while.

INTERMARRIAGE.

Next comes the intermarriage of God's people with the enemy. They meet in the social intimacies of life. They find the people of the world agreeable and profitable, and they consent to the forbidden fellowships and intermarriages of the godly and the ungodly, which in every age have preceded a time of corruption and great wickedness. No child of God has any right to intermarry with the ungodly, and a true parent dare not consent to such a union without involving the eternal wellbeing of the child. It is never safe to disobey God, and I have no hesitation in saying that I would not perform such a marriage ceremony.

IDOLATRY.

The next step is partnership in idolatry and the forsaking of Jehovah's worship for the shameful rites of heathenism. Chapter iii. 6, 7: "And they took their daughters to be their wives, and they gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods, and the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served Baalim and the groves."

GOD'S ANGER.

The culmination of all this soon came in the anger of Jehovah, and His severe and righteous judgment upon His disobedient people. And so we read, "The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so they could not any more stand before their enemies, and whithersoever they went out the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them; and they were greatly distressed." (Chapter ii. 14, 15.)

What a dreadful thing it is to have God

against us, and to know that He who controls the very breath of our lives, and all the elements of destruction around us, is compelled by His very nature to deal contrary to us, and to consume us, even as fire must consume every combustible thing that it touches! God is compelled to be against sin, and while He pities the sinner He hates the sin; and while we are against God, His very presence must be to us a consuming fire, and even heaven would be hell to the sinful soul, and it would fly from the awful blaze of His holy glance as from a lightning flash, and long to hide itself in hell.

GIVEN UP.

But there is something even more sad than this, for we read that God gave them up to the power of their enemies, and allowed the Canaanites, whom they themselves had trifled with and taken into covenant, to be the thorns and snares of judgment and temptation to them.

There is nothing more terrible in all the judgments pronounced against them than this: "Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as

thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you." (Chapter ii. 3.)

"And He said, Because this people hath transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto My voice; I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died. That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord, to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not."

And so God allowed them to be filled with their own devices, and tempted and tried by the very results of their own disobedience. Nay, further, we read in chapter iii. 8, that He even "sold them into the hands of their enemies," and gave their foes a power to subdue and enslave them which they themselves could never have claimed without the divine permission. Henceforth the Canaanite, the Philistine, the Syrian, and Assyrian, the Babylonian, and the Roman, were but the executioners of divine judgment, and wrought their conquests and captivities by direct divine permission.

All this represents a very awful truth, which the New Testament undoubtedly confirms, namely, that God's last and most terrible judgment is to allow the devil to have power over the disobedient soul, and to permit temptation to overcome and to torment and punish us because of our wilful disobedience to the will of God, and our rejection of the grace that would have saved us. The saddest thing about the condition of the poor sinner is that while he thinks he is free, and has the power to reform and do as he pleases, he is the helpless slave of Satan, "taken captive by him at his will," and he never can be free until he repents and renounces the dominion of God's great enemy, and appeals to the blood of Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Ghost to break the fetters of his captivity.

And there may come a time in the life of a wicked man, when, through persistent rejection of light, and right, he shall be given over, as we read in the first chapter of Romans, "to a reprobate mind, and to vile affections," and he shall find within him a power compelling him to evil, and possessing him with the devil just

as one can be possessed and constrained by the Holy Ghost.

HARDENED.

This is the explanation of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. This is the last stage of impenitence and despair. This never comes to any soul until he has rejected and refused the mercy of God, and deliberately chosen evil instead of good, and Satan instead of God. God punishes him by letting him have Satan to the full, or as it is expressed so graphically in the first chapter of Proverbs, "They would none of My counsel, they despised all My reproof, therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

But it is possible even for the child of God to be delivered over to the power of temptation through a continuance in wilful and persistent disobedience. The very things that we choose become our punishment, and we find ourselves through our own deliberate disobedience, under terrible forms of temptation which we have not the power to resist. The reason is that we are in a place where God

never wanted us to be. We have brought upon ourselves our own tormentors. The grace of God is equal to all His will for us, and He knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation, but He has not promised His grace for self-imposed burdens, dangers or situations that are contrary to His divine purpose.

There is nothing sweeter in life than to be conscious of being so encased in the armor of the Holy Ghost, that that Wicked One toucheth us not, and every fiery shot glances off, as the shot and shell are repelled by the armor plate upon the battleship, and we walk through the hosts of hell as safe and unscathed as if we were treading the courts of heaven. But there is also an experience where we are conscious that Satan has a power over our hearts, that the fiery dart does pierce through and stain the sensitive soul, that the evil instigation does become a part of our very thought and feeling, and that we are not in perfect victory over the power of evil. This is the meaning of the Master's prayer for us, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One."

This is the meaning of hell. This is the beginning of torment. This is the retribution of sin. This is something even more bitter than the wrath of God. It is the culmination of the first step of unbelief, disobedience and spiritual declension. Let us guard against the first step, and let us ask Him to save us from the causes which led His people of old into these depths of wretchedness and sin.

THE CAUSES OF ISRAEL'S FAILURE.

The first cause was incomplete and unfinished work. They did not thoroughly finish the battle; they entered into compromises with evil; they failed to be thorough and wholehearted in their dealing with Him. Let us look well to it, that we give no place to the devil, and that we allow the world and the flesh no standing ground.

All Satan asks is toleration of a single root of bitterness, unbelief and self-indulgence; but as surely as God is true that single sin will destroy us in the end.

Again, they failed to recognize their temptations as God's provings to see what they would do. He allowed these things to come that He

might test their obedience, and so He lets temptations come to us not that they may overcome us, but that they may establish us. If we would ever recognize them as God's tests, and rise above them to meet His higher will, they would become occasions for grander victories and higher advances.

But, thirdly, the real secret of their failure was their lack of a true, personal and independent hold upon God as the Source of their strength. There is one passage in the opening verses of this book which explains the whole situation. (Judg. ii. 7.) "And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that He did for Israel." Here we see the cause of the whole trouble. They leaned upon Joshua and Joshua's immediate successors more than they leaned upon God. They got their ideas and inspirations from human leaders, but they did not stand personally rooted and grounded in God for themselves, and when the shock of conflict came they failed. Indeed, their own language on a previous oc-

casion shows that they did not really understand their own helplessness, and their utter need of Jehovah.

SELF-CONFIDENCE.

In the closing chapter of the Book of Joshua we read, that when that great leader had gathered the people together at Shechem, and had given them his parting charges, they answered with unreserved assurance, "We will serve the Lord, for He is our God," and Joshua answered them, "Ye cannot serve the Lord" (Josh. xxiv. 19).

Doubtless what Joshua meant was they could not in their self-confident strength do anything but fail and sin. But they had not learned the lesson, and confident in their self-sufficiency they did fail and sink into the lowest depth of sin and misery, and the triumphs of Jericho, Bethhoron, Hebron and Gibeon ended in the tears of Bochim, and the captivity of their foes.

Thank God there is an antipodes to Bochim. It is that other place of which the inspired prophet has said, "Thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah" (Isa. lxii. 4). Bo-

chim is the place of weeping; Beulah is the place of love and joy. Bochim means the failure of our strength; Beulah means married unto Him, and kept by His power from stumbling and from failure.

Let us go to Bochim and learn our helplessness, and then let us go forth to Beulah, and leaning upon His love and strength go forward, singing: "Thanks be unto God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ Jesus"; "I can do all things through Christ, who is my Strength."

CHAPTER II.

SINNING AND REPENTING

"And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of the spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. Nevertheless, the Lord raised up judges which delivered them out of the hand of those that had spoiled them, and yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them. They turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so. And when the Lord raised them up judges then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. For it repented the Lord because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass when the judge was dead that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way" (Judg. ii. 14-19).

THIS, in a few sentences, is the story of the whole Book of Judges. It is a story of sinning and repenting. It is a picture of the Church and the Christian in a state of deep declension, and it is a declension all the

more deep and dark because it followed a condition of the highest spiritual blessing. It came, not as the wandering in the wilderness did, after deliverance from Egypt, but it came after their victorious entrance into Canaan, and their enjoyment of the life and victory and the fulness of God's blessing.

THE DARK AGES.

Its historical parallel is the story of the Dark Ages in the history of Christianity, when for centuries the Church sank into apostacy and worldliness, and for a thousand years the light of truth and holiness was almost wholly blotted out; and this after the story of Pentecost and the light of apostolic days. It has its individual parallel in the experience of a child of God, when, after the baptism of the Holy Ghost, he falls back into spiritual declension and disobedience, and returns to a life of sinning and repenting. It is a far sadder experience because of the light and the power he has known before, and the lessons of this book may well warn every one of us to give all diligence to "hold fast the beginning of our confidence and the rejoicing of our hope unto the end."

Let us look at the first two examples of God's dealing with this sinful people.

OTHNIEL.

The first is the story of Othniel (Judg. iii. 7-11): "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot their Lord, and served Baalim and the groves. Therefore the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim, king of Mesopotamia. And the children of Israel served him eight years. And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer to the children of Israel who delivered them, even Othniel, the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel and went out to war, and the Lord delivered Chushanrishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand, and the land had rest forty years. And Othniel, the son of Kenaz, died."

EHUD.

The next is the story of Ehud (Judg. iii. 12-30): "And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord

strengthened Eglon, king of Moab, against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the Lord, and He gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees. So the children of Israel served Eglon, the king of Moab, eighteen years. But when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised them up a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, a Benjamite, a man left-handed, and by him the children of Israel sent a present unto him, and he was sitting in a summer parlor which he had for himself alone. And Ehud said unto him, I have a message from God unto thee. And he arose out of his seat. And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh and thrust it into his bowels . . . And Ehud escaped while they tarried, and passed beyond the quarries, and escaped unto Seirath. And it came to pass when he was come that he blew a trumpet on the mountain of Ephraim, and the children of Israel went down with him from the mount, and he before them, and he said unto them, Follow after me, for the Lord hath delivered your

enemies, the Moabites, into your hand. And they went down after him, and took the fords of Jordan toward Moab, and suffered not a man to pass over. And they slew of Moab at that time about ten thousand men, all lusty and all men of valor, and there escaped not a man. So Moab was subdued that day under the hand of Israel, and the land had rest fourscore years."

These two incidents, following each other in direct succession, illustrate the progression of evil, and at the same time the progression of grace on the part of God.

REPEATED SIN.

We cannot fail to notice here the aggravation of repeated sin. We read in the seventh verse, "That the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord"; and we read in the twelfth verse, "That the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the Lord." But the effects of their repeated sin were much more serious than in the first instance. After their first disobedience we are told that God sold them into the hand of the enemy, and they served him eight years. But in the second

instance the Lord not only gave them into the hand of their enemy, but we are told "that the Lord strengthened Eglon, the king of Moab, against Israel." And this time they served the enemy, not eight, but eighteen years.

Here we find God working on the side of their enemies, and giving them power to afflict His people, and we see that the effect of continuance in sin is to prolong the period of our chastisements and to fix the habit of evil until it becomes almost permanent. It is an awful truth that evil men wax worse and worse, and the power of sin to hurt us and to hold us increases with every repetition. It was not merely that God prolonged their captivity by His arbitrary will, but it seems as if they themselves have been so paralyzed by their sin and judgment that they did not even think of turning to Him for eighteen years.

It would seem as if God always listened to them when they cried unto Him, but the saddest effect of their sin was that they even forgot His former mercy, and failed to lift up to Him their penitent cry. But over against their sin how marked the mercy of their long-suffer-

ing God. The moment they turned to Him in prayer and penitence, He heard their cry and sent them help. How striking is the expression, "And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord He raised them up a deliverer." His mercy was instant, and His deliverance was complete.

And then when He restored them from their captivity, the duration of the blessing was in proportion to the length of the judgment. When He saved them from the captivity of Chushanrishathaim eight years long, He gave them rest for forty years, and when He saved them from the captivity of Eglon, eighteen years long, He gave them rest for eighty years. It would seem as if His mercy was graduated in a scale of progression in contrast with their sorrows and their sin. The days of blessing were more than four times as long as the days of punishment and pain.

Is there one who reads these lines who is looking back to some dark chapter of backsliding and spiritual loss? Take comfort even from the story of Israel's sin. Only turn to God in true-hearted repentance and obedience,

and He says, "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker worm, and palmer worm (My great army that I sent against you)."

How beautiful to observe in the story of Simon Peter, that when the Lord restored him after his threefold sin, He gave him a threefold blessing and commission, as if he would put a mark of honor over against every scar that the disciple had brought upon himself. "He will make us glad according to the days wherein He has afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."

Yes, such is the mercy of God, but, oh, how much better and sweeter the grace of God which is able to keep us from stumbling, "to preserve us blameless unto the coming of the Lord," and "to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

HUMAN LEADERS.

There are some further lessons in connection with these incidents that are well worthy of our careful attention. You will notice how all through this period the people were dependent upon human leaders. Indeed this seems to have been their bane all through. They were

faithful to God as long as Joshua lived, but they had no direct dependence on Joshua's God. Theirs was a reflected goodness, derived from the circumstances and the people that surrounded them. And so they were true to God while their judge led them on to victory, and ruled over them afterwards, but when he died their heart like the sapling that has been only bent sprang back again to its natural wilfulness, and as the writer has so well expressed it: "They ceased not from their own doing, nor from their stubborn ways; they went a whoring after other gods, and turned quickly out of the way their fathers walked in."

Here we see the whole root of bitterness, a superficial experience, influenced by persons and circumstances, while our natural heart still remains, and we are not personally united to the Lord Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Ghost, for ourselves. The promise of this dispensation, thank God, is not that we shall have Othniels and Ehuds, Joshuas and Calebs to lead us, but that the Holy Spirit shall be "poured out upon all flesh," and we

“shall not need to teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Him from the least even unto the greatest.”

We are therefore to look for our spiritual types not in the condition of the people at this time, but in the spirit of the leaders. These men were patterns of what each of us may be today in the power of the Holy Ghost.

In Othniel we see, according to the literal meaning of his name, “the lion-hearted man,” the man of faith and holy courage. We have heard of this man before. It was he who, at Caleb’s challenge, had dared to assault the stronghold of Kirjath Sepher (chap. i. vs. 12), and as a reward for his victory won the hand of Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, whose name means “grace.” And with her he received a dowry of special grace and blessing. Othniel stands for the faith which in the very first teachings of our Christian life dares to take the victory and receives the fulness of grace for ourselves, and then, later, when others need our help, we are prepared to lead them into the same victory which we have won.

There is a story back of every story. There is a life behind every public record of triumph and distinction. The Othniel who led Israel to victory against the mighty emperor of the East was not the creation of a moment, was not the accident of a great occasion; but was the outgrowth and development of a long-past history, when as a young man he met the crisis hour of his own life, and dared to believe God and overcome his enemies in the strength of God and to win the blessing which enabled him now to meet the greater occasion, and to stand as the first of Israel's judges and conquerors. And so there comes to each of us a moment when we meet life's issues all alone, and as we stand true and triumph over self and sin, God's mark is placed upon us, and He puts us aside for the day when He will need a brave leader and a chosen instrument for some of the great occasions of the world's history; and it will be found true again, as it ever has been true, "that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly unto Himself."

The other incident of Ehud and his deliverance of Israel is not quite so clear at first sight.

For Ehud stands before us, apparently, in the light of a secret assassin. By deep subtlety and in the disguise of a friend he gains access to the presence of Eglon, the oppressor of his country, and, asking a private audience, he whispers in his ear the awful secret, "I have a message from God to thee," and then, swift as the lightning flash, he pierces him to the heart with the hidden dagger, and strikes down the life of his country's oppressor. Indeed, a good many commentators have tried to excuse Ehud's act, or at least to exonerate God from all responsibility for it by calling attention to the fact that it is not said, as in the case of Othniel, that the Spirit of God came upon him. They seem disposed to apologize for him, or at least, to make him responsible for his own act, and leave it as at least a doubtful thing. But a candid reader cannot fail to notice that the inspired writer makes no such attempt to evade responsibility, but frankly speaks of Ehud as the deliverer that God raised up to save His people, and recognizes his whole career as that of a divine leader and judge.

EHUD REPRESENTED DIVINE GOVERNMENT.

How then shall we justify his act of apparent murder? Surely, the answer is plain. It was not Ehud's act, it was not an act of private vengeance or even patriotic fervor; but he gives us the explanation himself in his awful message to Eglon. He was acting as a divinely appointed judge, and the executioner of God's sentence against a wicked and condemned man. "I have a message from God to thee," is his solemn word as he suits the action to the word, and strikes down the bold and impious transgressor at his feet. He was simply acting as the judge upon the bench when he sentences the murderer to his doom, or as the public executioner when he fulfils the decree of the State and takes the life that has been forfeited by law for public crime. Ehud in this acts by divine command, and in the divine name, so that his victim stands before us as the type of our spiritual oppressor, and Ehud as the example of that faith which meets the enemy, not in our own name or strength, but in the name and strength of Jehovah, and triumphs even as He.

Is there not for us an inspiring lesson in this attitude? Is it not our privilege to identify ourselves with God in all we say and do, and to go forth to lives of victory in His name? Is not this the very meaning of that strong expression, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"? Is it prayer? Let us identify ourselves with Him, until it shall not be our prayer, but God's prayer in us, and we shall know that the answer must be given. Is it temptation? Let us meet the devil as a conquered foe, and standing in the very person of our victorious Lord, let us say to him, "I have a message from God to thee. He bids thee fly. Get thee hence, Satan, in the name of Jesus"; and in that mighty name we shall cast out demons, and tread upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy. Or is it service? Are we called to speak for our Master or our fellow men? Again, let it be not our message, but His; not our ideas, and opinions, and pleadings, but the very word from the throne, delivered to men with the authority of God, and let us look into their conscience and say in the name of our

Master, "I have a message from God to thee," and our words will be clothed with power, and the Holy Ghost will convict men of sin and righteousness and judgment, and seal our messages with precious souls and lasting fruits.

This is the true spirit of ministry. "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God. If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability that God giveth, that God may in all things be glorified through Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER III.

SHAMGAR, DEBORAH AND BARAK

“And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens” (Heb. xi. 32-34). Compare with Judges iii. 31 and iv. 14, 15.

THE night brings out the stars, and so the darkest times of national and church history are always the occasions for the development of the highest types of genius and character. The long, sad story of the Judges revealed a Deborah and a Barak, a Gideon and a Samson, an Othniel and a Jephthah. The times of Ahab and Jezebel were made illustrious by the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, the dark night of the middle ages was made luminous by the testimony of a Wyckliffe, a Luther, and a Knox.

The story of divine mercy and Christian faith is written on the dark background of human sin and crime. We are to look at a few of these stars of the night as they shine in the firmament of the Book of Judges.

SHAMGAR.

The story of Shamgar (Judg. iii. 31) introduces us to a humble farmer in Southern Palestine, whose only weapon was the implement of his daily toil, and whose battlefield was a country road, but who stands forever illustrious among the heroes of faith and the saviours of his country. Following his simple plow and oxen, and carrying in his hand the rude ox-goad, which was just a long wooden shaft, with a sharp prod at one end, and an iron shovel at the other, to clean the plow-share, he suddenly found himself surrounded by a band of Philistines, the precursors of another invasion of the land. Seizing his ox-goad by the small end, and turning it into a formidable club, he suddenly charged his foes, and, as they turned and fled before his fierce attack, he pursued them with such resistless fury that before the day was over six hundred

of them lay dead around him. Doubtless it was more than human prowess, but like David's battles, one of those times of supernatural inspiration, when God Himself took possession of His chosen instrument, and one was able to chase a thousand, and send dismay into the hearts of a host of enemies. Doubtless this battle was a crisis in the history of his country, and stayed some greater invasion, and as these men went back to tell the tale of their strange disaster, their neighbors began to think that if one man could do such wonders, it would scarcely be safe to meet an army of such men.

Now, Shamgar represents in some very striking ways the spirit of Christian faith and victory. Here we see a man standing in the ordinary walks of life, and meeting an emergency as it comes to him, without stepping aside from the path of ordinary duty. He does not need to mount a pedestal, and be placed in some illustrious position, to be a hero, but he just stands in the place where God has put him, and there becomes illustrious through the force of his own personal character and con-

duct. He does not go out of his way to find a mission, but he meets the events that come to him in the ordinary course of life, and turns them into occasions for faith and victory.

MEN IN SECULAR CALLINGS.

He represents the men and women who stand in secular callings, and who find a pulpit and a ministry just where God has placed them, amid the tasks and toils of daily life. He stands for the business man at his counting house and in his office, and finds a thousand opportunities for fighting the battle of the Lord and doing good to his fellow men amid the circumstances of his daily calling.

I know a humble shoemaker in a New England town who finds in his little shop every day a dozen opportunities for preaching Christ, as well as living the Gospel, and who has been used of God to lead scores of his visitors and customers to the experience and the blessing which has transformed his own heart and life. I know a captain on one of our coast lines of steamers who preaches the Gospel in his plain and modest way to tens of thousands of his passengers every year, and whose little cabin

has been the birthplace of hundreds of precious souls for whom he lies in wait with ceaseless watchful tact and love. I know more than one business man whose office is an object lesson of Bible texts and divine messages, and who never meets a caller without some hint of eternal things, and never writes a letter without some little enclosure which can speak for God and salvation.

Shamgar did not have to wait till he had a sword or spear or battle-bow from the armory, but he took the weapon that lay next at hand, and he turned it against the enemy, and so God wants your real resources just as they are, to be used for Him. He is asking thee, "What is that in thine hand?" and Moses' rod, and Dorcas' needle, and Shamgar's ox-goad, and David's sling and stone, and Joshua's ram's horn, and the lad's five loaves and two fishes, and the widow's little can of oil are all that He requires for His mightiest victories and His grandest ministries. Give Him what you have, be faithful where you are, do what you can, and He will do the rest.

"If you want a field of labor,
You can find it anywhere."

Shamgar's may seem a little victory compared with Gideon's, and so it was, so far as numbers were concerned, but doubtless it was used of God to prevent some greater invasion, and render needless some more costly victory afterwards; and so the little things we sometimes do, the faithfulness with which we meet some trifling opportunity may prevent some greater disaster, or be the occasion of some mightier blessing than we can at the time foresee.

It may seem but a little thing for a brave woman in a dark and stormy night to dash along the railroad track and signal the rushing train to stop before it reaches the broken bridge, but that single act of heroism saves a hundred lives. It may seem a little thing for a little band of heroes to hold a pass against an army, but that was the key to the whole situation. It may be a trifling thing for a quiet English girl to find a ragged street urchin, and induce him to go to Sunday school by giving him a suit of clothes, and then, when he played

her false, to hunt him up weeks afterwards, and give him another suit of clothes, and yet again the third time to refuse to be discouraged by his deception, until at last her patience triumphed, and that boy was won for Christ; but the day came when that little act of tireless love was God's first step in the evangelization of the millions of China, for that boy became Robert Morrison, the pioneer of modern missions in the East, and the first in that glorious line who shall yet come with their trophies from the land of Sinim.

Ah, these are the little things that God loves to glorify! God help many of us to watch for these wayside opportunities and win these battles of faith and fortitude while we may.

DEBORAH AND BARAK.

Our next illustration is the story of Deborah and Barak. Here we are introduced at once to a new instrumentality in the work of God, namely, the ministry of woman.

Deborah stands before us in strong contrast with the customs and prejudices of her time—a woman called to lead in a great national crisis, and to stand in the front both of states-

manship and war as the head of the nation. It goes without saying that this is an unqualified recognition of the ministry of woman, and with such an example backed up by so many honored successors, let no man deny the place of woman in the history of nations and the ministries of Christianity.

At the same time the story of Deborah is as clear in limiting as it is in permitting the ministry of woman. It gives no encouragement to the "new woman" in her absurd attempt to usurp the place or the appearance of man. A mannish woman is an outrage upon her own sex and a caricature of the other sex. She falls between two fires, for she falls short of manhood, and she falls out of womanhood. Christ Himself has established the natural and spiritual law that the head of every woman is the man, and the head of the man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God. This is the type of womanhood that Deborah represented.

WOMAN'S PLACE.

While she knew that she was called by her spiritual qualifications to lead her people to deliverance from the enemy, yet she took par-

ticular pains to find a man to be the executive officer of her plans, and the leader of God's hosts in the divine campaign. Her chief business was to put Barak in the front, and then stand by him with her counsels, her prayers, her faith, and her wholesome reproof, for Deborah was a practical and sensible woman. Her name signifies "the bee," and she was well provided with the sting as well as the honey, and knew how to stir up Barak by wholesome severity as well as encourage him by holy inspiration. He is a very foolish man who refuses to be helped by the shrewd, intuitive wisdom of a true woman, for while her head may not be so large, its quality is generally of the best; and her conclusions, though not reasoned out so elaborately, generally reach the right end by intuitions which are seldom wrong. Woman's place is to counsel, to encourage, to pray, to believe, and preeminently to help. This was what Deborah did, and in this Deborah was the type of woman's scepter, which is that of yieldedness and love rather than dogmatism and defiance.

MAN'S HELPMATE.

Again, we see in the story of Barak a man of weak and timid faith, losing much by his diffidence, and yet used of God and lifted to a diviner faith by the inspiration of Deborah. Barak shrank at first from the unexpected call to lead a little army of ten thousand men against the myriads of Sisera, and he only consented at last on condition that Deborah should go with him. By his timidness he lost not a little of the honor that he might have won, and his sharp and penetrating monitress plainly told him that the victory should not be wholly to his credit, for God should deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman; and so there were really two women in this case, and Barak was sandwiched in between them. With Deborah in front, and Jael in the rear, and Barak in the midst, even poor, weak Barak became one of the heroes of faith who shine in the constellation of eternal stars, upon which the Holy Ghost has turned the telescope of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

Yes, God can use the weakest instruments, and He generally does choose the poor in

spirit, and the temperaments that are naturally the opposite, to clothe them with His supernatural might, and use the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the strong, and the things that are despised, yea, and the things that are not, "to bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence."

Look at Isaiah, when God called him to his splendid ministry. How little he thought of himself, as he cried, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips!" and yet God used him to unfold the majestic visions of Messianic prophecy.

Look at Jeremiah, as he shrank back into his conscious nothingness, and cried, "Lord, I am a little child," and yet God took that trembling reed, and made him a pillar of strength and a fenced brazen wall of resistance against the kings, the prophets, and the priests of Israel, and the grandest figure of the last days of Jerusalem. Yes, He can take us in our weakness and nothingness, and make us strong in His might to the pulling down of strongholds.

DEBORAH'S MESSAGE.

Barak was not always weak; there came a time when he responded to the inspiring call of faith and became a hero. Deborah's message to him is all alive with the very spirit and innermost essence of the faith that counts the things that are not as though they were. "Up!" she cries, as she rouses him by a trumpet call from his timorous inactivity; "for this is the day," she adds, as she shakes him out of his procrastination; "in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand," she goes on to say, as she reckons upon the victory as already won. "Is not the Lord gone out before thee?" she concludes, as she commits the whole matter into Jehovah's hands, and bids him simply follow on and take the victory that is already given.

Is it possible for faith to speak in plainer terms, or language to express with stronger emphasis the imperative mood and the present tense of that victorious faith, to which nothing is impossible?

Again, we have here the lesson of mutual service. This victory was not all won by any

single individual, but God linked together, as He loves always to do, many co-operating instruments and agents in the accomplishment of His will. Here was Deborah representing the spirit of faith and of prophecy. There was Barak representing obedience and executive energy. There were the people that willingly offered themselves; the volunteers of faith. There were the yet nobler men of Zebulun and Naphtali that jeopardized their lives unto the death, the martyrs of sacrifice who are the crowning glory of every great enterprise. And there was Jael, the poor heathen woman away out on the frontiers of Israel, who gave the finishing touch, and struck the last blow through the temples of the proud Sisera, while high above all were the forces of nature, and the unseen armies of God's providence; for the stars in their courses fought against Sisera, and the flood of the Kishon rolled down in mountain torrents and swept the astonished foe away.

Still again, we see the curse of neutrality, and the pitiful spectacle which seems always to be present—the unfaithful, ignoble and indif-

ferent ones who quietly looked on while all this was happening, and not only missed their reward, but justly received the curse of God's displeasure and judgment. And so, in the Song of Deborah, we hear of Reuben's enthusiastic purposes, but ultimate debates and doubts, so that he does nothing. We see her fiery scorn for those who stayed among the bleatings of the sheepfolds, rather than the trumpet of the battle. We see her sarcasm strike the selfish men of Gilead who abode beyond Jordan; the careless Danites, who remained in their ships, and the men of Asher who, secure in their naval defenses, lingered yonder on the seashore, and took refuge in their ports and inland rivers, while, above all the echoes of her denunciation, rings out the last awful curse against the inhabitants of Meroz, a little obscure city that probably had taken refuge in its insignificance, because its inhabitants had refused to come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty.

Beloved, God's mighty warfare is raging still. Let us beware lest we, too, shall hide in vain behind our littleness and meet at last the

same tremendous curse, because in these last days, when millions are dying without the Gospel, and the coming of our Master waits but a few short years of heroic faithfulness, we perhaps shall hear Him say, "Curse ye the servant who refused to use his single talent and his single pound, just because it was so small, and came not up to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

Finally, this scene is a pattern page from God's book of remembrance. Some day we shall read the other pages, and find our names recorded either with the inhabitants of Meroz and Reuben, or with the victors of faith who stood with Deborah, Barak and Jehovah in the battles of the Lord. Oh, shall we shine like stars in the night now, and then like the sun in the kingdom of our Father?

CHAPTER IV.

GIDEON, OR THE STRENGTH OF WEAKNESS

"God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, . . . that no flesh should glory in His presence" (I. Cor. i. 27, 29).

"And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor." . . . "And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" (Judg. vi. 12, 14.)

"And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands" (Judg. vii. 2).

THE strength of weakness leaning upon God, and the weakness of human strength—this is the paradox, this is the spiritual truth of which Gideon's life is the illustration.

GIDEON'S CALL.

We see this principle illustrated in Gideon's call. Hiding behind his winepress and seeking by stealth to thresh a little wheat for his

family without being discovered by the Midianites, the angel of the Lord suddenly appears before him with the startling greeting, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valor!" Gideon felt anything but a mighty man of valor, and he must have looked it, too, as he began to apologize and explain to the angel the helplessness and distress of his people, when the answer came as the Lord looked upon him, and said, "Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel. Have I not sent thee?" And Gideon understood that it was not his might nor valor, but the Lord's, that was to save his country. It was the strength of faith which is always the strength of weakness because it is the strength of God.

This is always the story of grace and the secret of supernatural power. It is ever a paradox to the natural mind. "When I am weak, then am I strong," is the proper inscription of every victorious saint.

God comes to the sinner and by a word of sovereign grace pronounces him forgiven, and that word makes him what it declares. He comes to the sinful soul, and says, "Now are

ye clean through the word that I have spoken unto you," and that word creates the fact of his sanctification. He comes to the struggling Jacob, and by a word transforms him into the conquering Israel. He comes to the stormy Boanerges, and, lo, he is henceforth the gentle John, rising above all human probabilities and natural causes. Grace speaks and it is done, and faith counts the things that are not as though they were, and Gideon, the trembling fugitive from his foes, stands panoplied the next hour in the strength of God, the mighty victor.

GIDEON'S FAITH.

But next we see this principle in the test of Gideon's faith. Henceforth he is no longer the natural man, but the man of faith; but how weak his faith is, and how slowly it develops into maturity and confidence.

First, he asks a sign from his supernatural visitor that he may know for a certainty that it is the Lord, and so he prepares an offering and brings it to the angel, and as he presents the kid and unleavened cakes, lo, the staff in the angel's hand touches the offering, and it is con-

sumed in a moment in flames of fire. No sooner has Gideon's test been granted than he breaks down with a cry of fear. "Alas, O Lord God! because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." Gideon is reassured by the comforting message of the Lord, "Peace be unto thee; fear not; thou shalt not die," and so he builds an altar unto the God of Peace, and goes forth to take his first step of faith and obedience.

This begins at his own home and his father's house, for there the altars of Baal are erected, and the worship of the false gods of the Canaanite is carried on beneath his own roof. God's first command is to build an altar unto Jehovah, and offer upon it his father's bullock in sacrifice to Jehovah, and then tear down the altar of Baal and cut down the grove. Still we see the timid man and the trembling faith even in his obedience. He takes a few men and stealthily by night he secretly does what he was commanded, and in the morning his neighbors look with astonishment and anger upon the wreck of their shrine, and the evidences of Gideon's bold rebellion. They soon find out

who the guilty party is, and their cries are loud and unanimous that he shall die. But Joash, his shrewd father, tactfully turns aside the anger of the people by suggesting that if Baal is a true god he ought to kill Gideon himself, and should have been able to defend himself against the insult offered to his shrine. The father's brave attitude turns the tide, and God sustains His obedient child, as He ever will the heart that dares to trust in Him.

But no sooner has Gideon begun his grave task than the devil also begins to stir up his forces and resources. The Amalekites and Midianites assemble with a mighty army of one hundred and thirty-five thousand men, and pitch their camp in the valley of Jezreel. Then the Spirit of God comes upon Gideon, and he blows a mighty trumpet call and, lo, the people of his city and his clan gather around his standard; and from Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali volunteers pour in, until Gideon stands at the head of an army of thirty thousand men.

GIDEON'S SIGNS.

But again we see his faith begin to falter,

and once more he comes to Jehovah for a reassuring word or sign. God is very gentle with His trembling servant; He sees the true purpose of obedience, and He gives him time to be sure. He always does. When God commands us to take any important step He always will grant us all the certainty and all the strength we need. Gideon asks a sign suggested by his simple pastoral life, namely, that the fleece upon the floor of the barn shall be filled with dew while all around is dry; and, sure enough, next morning he wrings a bowl of water from the soaking fleece, while not a dewdrop is to be seen on flower or blade of grass. Still Gideon shrinks from going forward, and once more asks a sign from God, namely, that the token of last night shall be reversed, and that the fleece shall be dry the next morning, while all the ground and grass shall be soaked with dew. Once again God answers his request and grants the asked for sign.

There was one good thing about Gideon's second request. He was willing to have his sign turned upside down. Sometimes when

we are asking guidance we want it all one way, and this is usually the reason why we are so oft misguided. We are biased in our preference. We want the dew always in our fleece, and we are not so willing that it shall be dry; but Gideon's will was so fully surrendered to God that he was ready to take His answer either way, and so God could teach him. Not by these signs does God promise now to direct his children. For He has given to us His Holy Word and His Holy Spirit to show us the way in which we ought to go.

We should very carefully avoid resorting to the lot, or opening our Bibles at random, and a presumptuous and superstitious dependence upon auguries and portents, which leads so many astray.

In the Holy Scriptures we have a standard of right and wrong upon which we can always depend for the general principles at least which should direct our actions, and in the voice of the Holy Spirit we shall always have the special guidance which we need in particular circumstances. But there are certain conditions which we must ever observe. "The meek will

He guide in judgment." The yielded and willing heart will find His way. The selfish will, the heart that chooses its way and then comes to God to have Him indorse it, will be very likely to go astray.

The apostles gathered, from combining all the leadings in a given case, that God was directing them at an important crisis, and so the wise man will ever bring to every question not only the general principles of the Holy Scriptures, and the special whisperings of the Holy Spirit, but also a sanctified judgment and a calm, deliberate consideration of all the circumstances and providences concerned, and then will hold all humbly before the Lord in prayer, and suspend all action until impressions become absolute convictions and he can go forth with certainty and rest to follow the path that has been indicated, and leave results with God.

GIDEON'S BAND.

Next, we see the principle of our text illustrated in the selection of Gideon's men. It was a good thing for Gideon that he was weak and timid enough to wait at every point

for God's next word. It is quite possible for us to receive a command from the Lord and then to go forward blindly to obey it, and really find ourselves at last, in some measure at least, out of God's order even in seeking to obey Him, because we did not stop and hearken all along the way for His further orders. God does not give a wholesale manual of instructions for all the future, but He guides us step by step and day by day, and it is necessary for us at every moment to hearken and obey. Had Gideon gone right on with his thirty thousand, with floating banners and clanging trumpets and patriotic enthusiasm, he would surely have been defeated, and all God's promises would have failed. And so he wisely waited for his leader to point every step of the way. Beloved, we have not only a manual of instructions, but we have a living Lord, and a Leader to help us carry out our instructions. Let us walk closely with Him. For while with one breath He says, "Observe all the things whatsoever I have commanded you," in the other He says, "Lo, I am with you through all the days, even unto the end of the age."

This is the mistake the Church has often made; she has taken a set of doctrines and rules, and bound them up in a volume of instructions, principles and rules, creeds, confessions and doctrinal principles, and then gone forth to carry them out herself. We have no hesitation in saying that even the Bible without the Holy Ghost is not a sufficient guide for the Church or the Christian.

So as Gideon waits and hearkens, another message comes: "The people that are with thee are too many." And God begins to sift them, and, lo, Gideon beholds his splendid army melting away like snow upon the mountains, until two out of every three have gone back at the bidding of their fears. So God still tests us and lets us retire from the tasks for which He knows we are inadequate.

Ah, brother, you think it was God that led you to abandon that work for Him? Nay, God let you abandon it because He saw that you were afraid and would have failed, but had you dared more you might have had more.

But even the ten thousand that are left are still too many, and so there is a second test

and God again lets them test themselves. Oh, how solemn it is to know that every step we take we are weighing our own lives, and writing our own record, and fixing our own place of service and reward!

Gideon brings them up to the water brook, and simply watches them while they drink. The most of them, intent only upon drinking, and forgetting all about the foe, kneel down on the river brink, and drink and drink till they are satisfied, oblivious of all else, and never dreaming of the enemy who may be lurking right across the stream, ready to spring upon them in the unexpected moment. These men will not do for God's work, and so He puts them all aside. But there are a few, only three hundred, who go down to the water's edge in a very different fashion. With eyes alert they look around in every direction to guard against surprise or ambuscade, and then they just stoop down and lap the water with their hands, mouthful by mouthful, at the water's edge, watching between every mouthful for any possible surprise or assault, ready at a moment's notice to stand armed and equipped

for the battle. Ah, these are God's men, and Gideon sets them aside while the others go home with the timid ones, unfit to be used of God in His commission.

Beloved, how solemn, how true all this is for you and for me! God is always bringing us down to the valley of decision, to the test place of life. He gives you some blessing, some draught from the fountain of love and prosperity, and He watches to see how you will drink, and, lo, you become absorbed in your blessing; you get right down like them to drink and drink, and forget everything else. You show where your heart is, and God cannot trust you in His enterprises. Perhaps He gives you money, and immediately you become absorbed in business or pleasure, and you are not quite ready at God's call for the sudden emergency or the subtle opportunity.

Perhaps He gives you some friend, and that friend becomes more to you than Christ, or the call of duty, and He has to set you aside, not from heaven perhaps, but from His highest will. Perhaps it is some special service which is the test. He lets you have a soul or a work

for Him, and, lo, you become absorbed in your work, and you cannot hear His voice, you cannot watch His hand, you cannot be adjustable to His will, and God says, "Go home, drink all you want to; sleep on now, and take your rest, the opportunity is passed."

Oh, how the days are telling! Oh, how God is testing! Oh, how, unconsciously to ourselves, each of us is being weighed in the balance! God help us to be watchful, to walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

God does not give us notice of these tests before they come. This is an examination where the questions are not submitted to the candidates beforehand. We understand it all afterward, and, oh, how we wish that we had watched! It is not only for the rewards of glory, but it is for the sake of higher service here that our Master is picking out day by day His followers and preparing the vessels unto honor, which are to be sanctified and meet for the Master's use, and prepared for every good work. God wants a chosen people.

Dr. Chalmers had a phrase which might

well illustrate the story of Gideon's band. It was the expression, "out and out." He used to say God wants us to be "out and out." Gideon's people were "out and out." First, they were picked out from the thirty thousand, and then they were picked out from the ten thousand. There was a double selection, and so today God is picking out a people from even His professed followers, and then from these, yes, even from the consecrated ones, He is picking out a people who have not only received the Holy Ghost, but have followed Him truly through all the tests and all the deaths, all the way, so that He can say of them, as we read of the followers of the Lamb, in the day of His appearing, "The people that are with Him are tried, and chosen and faithful." God make us "out and out." God keep us tried and chosen and faithful. Then the "little one shall become a thousand," and the weakest saint "more than conqueror" through the omnipotence of God.

CHAPTER V.

THE WEAPONS OF OUR WARFARE

"The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds" (II. Cor. x. 4).

"And the three companies blew the trumpets and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands and cried, The sword of the Lord and of Gideon. And they stood every man in his place around about the camp; and all the host ran and cried and fled" (Judg. vii. 20, 21).

THIS is the crowning illustration of the supreme lesson of Gideon's life, the strength of weakness. In the weapons of Gideon's warfare as well as in Gideon and his followers, we see how God can use the weak things of this world to confound the strong, and the things that are not, to bring to naught the things that are.

GIDEON'S FEARS.

In the commencement of the final assault we still see the timidity of Gideon himself. As God sends him forward for the final attack upon the Midianites, He recognizes the fears

of His timorous servant. "Arise," He says. "get thee down unto the host; for I have delivered them into thy hand. But if thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah, thy servant, down to the host." And so God again encourages the trembling faith of His child by giving him another sign. Stealthily Gideon and his servant creep down to the edge of the hostile camp, and they listen cautiously outside one of the tents of the sleeping soldiers. It is just after ten o'clock at night, and the camp is wrapped in profound slumber. But one of the sleepers is suddenly wakened from a troubled dream, and he is telling his comrade how in his dream a round cake of barley bread came rolling into the host of Midian, and struck the tent and smashed it into ruins. The companion of the sleeper at once interpreted the dream. "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel, for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." This is enough to satisfy Gideon that God is already working, and the fears of the enemy are prophetic of their fate.

And so God is ever working for those that

trust Him. He can fight our battles for us in the very hearts of our enemies, and discomfit them before the conflict begins. Oh! for the faith to recognize our unseen Ally, and the forces and resources which are waiting at His command on every side to co-operate with those who trust and obey Him. The soul that you are seeking to save, and to which you may speak the final word to lead it to decision, has been under a preparation for that word through a whole chain of divine providences with which you have had nothing to do; and when you pass on God has still other agents and influences to take up your work and carry it on to consummation. When Elisha stood at Dothan surrounded by the Syrian armies it seemed to his frightened servant that all was lost; but there were armies in the sky and on the mountain tops more mighty than all their **foes**. And faith reckons on the unseen, and steps out into the darkness alone with God, to find that He is just as able to turn the Midianites against each other as to strike them by the sword of God and that He is already beginning to melt their hearts like wax, and prepare them by

their very dreams for the panic and disaster which is so soon to follow. So it matters not if Gideon's forces are but three hundred against one hundred and thirty-five thousand of his foes. It matters not that their weapons are but lamps, and pitchers, and trumpets, for they do not need to strike a blow in this great battle. Jehovah is going to turn the Midianites against the Amalekites, while Gideon's army stands waving the torch and blowing the trumpet of victory as they shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon."

These simple and apparently foolish weapons are fitting types of the weapons of our warfare which "are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

THE PITCHER.

This was just a vessel of earthenware. It did not need to be strong or beautiful. If it had been of iron, or of brass, it would have been useless. Its very frailty was its chief advantage, for it was of no service until it was broken. How well it represents these vessels of clay through which God is pleased to accomplish His high commissions and concerning

which He says: "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God," and "Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as weapons of righteousness unto God." These members are represented here as weapons. Our hands, our feet, our lips, our eyes, our ears, our physical senses are all so many weapons to be used against evil and for the Lord. Gideon's vessels had to be empty. And so God requires our bodies and spirits to be given to Him exclusively, and to be emptied of all our wilful, selfish and absorbing pre-emptions and ready at any moment for His use and service. Then, when they are filled with all of His indwelling life and broken like Gideon's pitchers so that the light may shine through, God will use them in their very weakness for the revelation of His glory and the accomplishment of His plans. We need not be troubled about the breaking of the pitchers. God will do that, or, at least, allow it to be done, but the circumstances and trials, perhaps the wrongs that come to us will furnish the occasion for the victory of His grace. I have seen a child of

God standing unmoved amid intense provocation, when the natural impulse would have been to speak the quick word and to take up and resent the wrong in a manner that might have seemed to the world more dignified and becoming. But instead of this there was nothing but the flushing crimson of the brow, the starting tear in the eye, the self-suppression that cost a moment's effort, and then the gentle silence and the sweet smile, and I have seen a strong man broken down by that victory of love and led to seek the grace that enabled a Christian child to triumph over his unkindness, and to let the light of God's love flash through a broken vessel and shine out because of the cruel wrong. I have seen some worker for Christ stand in silence and misrepresentation and wrong and wait for God to vindicate, and in the waiting days exhibit the as no self-vindication could ever have done, and then in the end come forth with God's own spirit of Christ and glorify God by that silence seal of approval and a vindication that human words could never have afforded.

God lets these things come in our lives just

that we may through them reveal the light of His grace and the Spirit of Him whose agony in Gethsemane and shame upon the cross were but the background on which the glory of His grace shone out with a luster transcending even the Transfiguration light.

THE LAMPS.

Gideon's lamps represented not only the light of truth and the Source of all light, the Holy Ghost, but more than this—the light of the indwelling Christ as an actual life in the innermost soul of the child of God; for the lamps were inside the pitchers and the Lord of Life must be in us if we would shine. They say that travelers in Arctic zones can take a piece of ice and shape it into a burning glass to concentrate the rays of the sun until they can kindle fires. But not so can human souls be kindled. The medium must be burning, too. Icy hearts cannot set other souls on fire.

“Thou must thyself be true,
If thou the truth wouldst teach.
Thy heart must overflow, if thou
Another heart wouldst reach.”

In speaking of the true seed of the kingdom

Christ says the good seed are "the children of the kingdom." And so again He says, "Ye are the light of the world." It is not what we say, but what we are and what Christ is within us that constitutes the strength of our testimony and the power of our life. It is the life of Christ within shining through the broken vessel in a suffering saint, a feeble instrumentality, that most honors God and most effectively works for His kingdom and glory.

THE TRUMPETS.

This is God's symbol of the Gospel message. A trumpet is just an artificial voice proclaiming a loud and startling message of alarm, or warning, or of command. How perfectly it represents the message of the Gospel. The trumpet is not a musical instrument. It has no fine inflections of tone, and no sweet cadences of elocution, but it is a loud, short, sharp summons meant to arouse and to move. The very word used for preaching is based on this figure, the trumpet of the herald. When Christ sent forth His disciples to preach He did not say, "Go, and give eloquent orations and artistic speeches," but He said, "Go, and proclaim as

a herald the glad tidings of salvation." Our message should be as clear and as urgent as the herald's trumpet, and so simple that none can misunderstand it. This was what John the Baptist said he was, "A Voice." There was not much honor in being a voice to express another's thought and message.

This is the chief business of the missionary of Christ. Let us not be misled by the inductions of our own reasonings and led into the idea that we are sent forth to heathen lands simply to gather about us bands of little children and train them up in the truths of Christianity and thus gradually prepare a Christian community; giving up as comparatively hopeless the hardened hearts of those that are mature in years and steeped in sin; for God sends us to these sinful and hardened lives, to men and to women, to homes and families, to the cannibal chief and the savage barbarian, to flash before them the light of the living Christ, and proclaim in their ears the message of their God; believing that He who spoke to Midian's myriads in the very dreams of the night, and filled their hearts with fear, can still speak to

the hearts of men and arouse them to repentance and obedience by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Let this be the aim of our work and the claim of our faith, and we shall still find that the weapons of our warfare are as mighty as of old, and that we need not be "ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

THE BATTLE CRY.

The battle cry of Gideon's band is full of instructive meaning. "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," it is translated, but if you look closely at the verse in Judges vii. 18, you will see that the word "sword" is not in the original, and it might truthfully be translated "God and Gideon," or "Jehovah and Gideon." It was indeed a startling battle cry—"God and Gideon!" There was no waste of words, but there could be no heightening of emphasis. The very words were almost as startling as the blast of the trumpet loud and long. "God and Gideon!" How it rang out over the midnight air until it echoed back from the hills and ra-

vines, until it was answered back by the shrieks and groans of the terrified and wounded men. "God and Gideon": it was a fitting watchword linking together the two great principles of divine operation and human co-operation. God comes first, for the battle is the Lord's. It is He who strikes down the enemy. It is He who uses and prepares the instrument. It is He who turns the foemen upon each other. It is He who fills their hearts with fear, and really decides the battle before it begins. It is He who is still present in all His unchanged omnipotence, and whose eyes run to and fro throughout the earth to show Himself upright in behalf of those whose hearts are perfect toward Him. It is He who saves us. It is He who sanctifies us. It is He who is our Healer, and Deliverer in temporal distress. It is He who, as the God of providence, still works in the events and circumstances of life in answer to His people's prayers. It is He who sits upon the throne—an ever present God, making all things work together for good to them that love Him. It is He who by the Holy Ghost convicts the world of sin and of righteousness

and judgment. He can break the hardest heart. He can change the most obdurate will. He can break down the iron walls of Hindu caste, and bring tribes and nations to seek and acknowledge Him. He can change the persecuting Saul into a humble apostle of Jesus Christ. He can prompt the hearts of men to lay their treasures at His feet, and supply the needed resources for the work of the Gospel and evangelization of the world. He does not need our religious tricks and our shameful compromises with the world in order to gain the favor of the rich and win the popularity of the crowd. Christianity is supernatural power, and the same God that led Israel with a Pillar of Cloud and Fire, who spoke at Pentecost through the tongues of flame, and opened Peter's prison door, and then struck his persecutor down upon his throne in his impious pride, is waiting to work the greater wonders of His grace in these last days of Christian advantage. Oh, for the sword of God! Oh, for the faith to claim it! Oh, for the proof of the promise, "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in Him, and He worketh."

THE SWORD.

There is the sword of Gideon, too. There is a place for man's obedience as well as for man's faith. So Gideon must himself be true, and his three hundred men must be adjusted and ready, and they must follow him just as closely as he followed Jehovah; for his command is urgent and imperative, "Look on me, and do likewise. As I do, so shall ye do." There must be perfect unity and precision of action. There is not much for us to do, but what He bids us that must we do, and do just as He bids us to. And then, when the victory was won and the tide was turned, there was still something to do. The foe must be followed up and pursued; the battle must be complete; the enemy must be cut off in their retreat at the fords of Jordan, and the very men that had been rejected the day before, the nine thousand seven hundred who had been sent home because of their failure at the testing waters, they now were permitted to come in at the finish and cut off the fleeing foe. And so there was a part for all.

This was the part of Gideon, and this the

object of our obedience and fellowship in the Gospel. God teach us to trust, as if all depended upon God, and to obey, as if all depended upon us.

CHAPTER VI.

SELF-RENUNCIATION AND SELF- AGGRANDIZEMENT

"Not I, but Christ that liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20).

"But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (Gal. v. 15).

"Then the men of Israel said unto Gideon, Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also. And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you" (Judg. viii. 22, 23).

"The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them," etc. (Judg. ix. 8-15).

THESE various passages constitute a composite picture representing with peculiar vividness the nature and malignity of self.

SELF-RENUNCIATION.

It stands out finely in the last chapter of Gideon's life. After fairly winning and deserving as the world goes, the honor of a crown, he had the grace and the humility to refuse it; and so his life stands out consistent to the close. It began in nothingness and end-

ed in self-abnegation. Many a beautiful life commences gloriously, and when God has blessed it, it gathers to itself the honor and glory of His blessing and ends in self-consciousness and fleshly pride. Saul commenced in apparent modesty, hiding under the stuff, but Saul ended a king of pride and the monument of humiliating failure and irretrievable ruin. This is often true of some noble Christian enterprise which is blessed in the days of its weakness and dependence upon God, but when it becomes strong and successful it is apt to rise into self-sufficiency and end in worldly conformity and the curse of selfishness. This has been the bane of Christianity in every age. Peter crucified with downward head became Peter the Pope and Prince of Christendom. And Prelacy has followed Papacy as far as it dared, and now ecclesiastical pride in a thousand new forms threatens the purity and simplicity of the Church of Christ with the same peril. A Republican form of government does not save a people from the kingship of human selfishness. The spirit of social preeminence, political bossism and personal ambition runs

through all our institutions and social life, and the Church has lost her power because the disciples are still disputing who should be the greatest. Christ's answer is forever unequivocal and plain, "He that will be great among you let him be your servant, and he that will be chiefest let him be your slave." There is no more necessary thing today than to guard the Church of God against the preeminence of men. No wise Christian worker will want to throw the shadow of his own personality too strongly across his work or become necessary himself to the success of his cause. God wants no Popes, whether they be on Caesar's throne, in St. Peter's Palace, Episcopal Sees, Salvation Army Dictators or Christian Alliance leaders. Let the secret of our strength be the simple apostolic rule, "One is your Master and ye are all brethren," "In honor preferring one another."

SELF-AGGRANDIZEMENT.

If we see self-renunciation in Gideon we soon find the opposite in his son. The story of Abimelech and the parable of Jotham, which crystallizes its lessons, stand out forever as the

portrait of self in the most subtle and destructive forms. Abimelech was the illegitimate son of Gideon, born of a Shechemite mother. He seems to have been ostracized in some measure from the family and lived at Shechem with his mother's relatives, while the other seventy sons of Gideon dwelt at Ophrah, their father's home. After Gideon's death the spirit of selfish ambition seized Abimelech, and, playing on the clannish jealousies of his brethren, the Shechemites, he persuaded them to join him in a revolutionary movement, setting himself up as king. He took the devil into partnership with him by going into the idolatrous temple of Baal Berith, and taking out of the treasury the money with which he hired a set of worthless fellows as the nucleus of his army. With these he made a sudden descent upon his father's home, and murdered all his brethren except Jotham, his youngest brother, who succeeded in escaping. Then he had himself proclaimed king, and assembled all the people of Shechem for the public coronation. There, in the historic Vale of Ebal and Gerizim, with glorious pageantry the corona-

tion ceremonies were opened, when, suddenly, Jotham, from an overhanging crag about eight hundred feet above the valley, appeared in view and uttered the striking parable of the "Bramble King," startling the crowd and the king with his sudden apparition and strange and sarcastic message which all could not fail to understand, and then as suddenly disappearing into the mountain recesses.

Jotham's parable was at once a portrait and a parable. It held up in words of burning scorn the meanness and the fleshliness of selfishness, and at the same time it told in unmistakable language the sequences that were sure to follow.

And surely they did follow in Abimelech's career, for after three years of apparent quietness and some show of welldoing, the curse began to unfold and the prophecy to be fulfilled. Abimelech and his Shechemite friends became estranged and more and more obnoxious to each other, and treachery met treachery, and hate met hate, until it culminated in a revolution against Abimelech by the men of Shechem. This was followed by war-

fare until the Shechemites were murdered by thousands, their city razed to the ground and sown with salt, and the last remnant of the citizens burned up in a horrible holocaust of cruelty, with the ruins of their stronghold. Abimelech presses on against his enemies, ravaging with fire and sword until at last he brings his foes to bay in the stronghold of Thebez, where, at last, a rock hurled from the battlements by a loyal woman crushes Abimelech's skull, and ends his destructive life with the violence which he had himself visited upon so many others. Truly fire had come out from the bramble of Abimelech to consume the men of Shechem and at last the fire consumed Abimelech himself.

The lessons of this story are rich, varied and most vivid.

THE FLESH.

1. We see the origin of self-aggrandizement. It is born of the flesh, even as Abimelech was born of the strange woman of Shechem. Self in all its forms, however subtle and disguised, is the fruit of the carnal nature, and it is the very root and center of the life and sin. It is

no use to attempt to cut off our sinful acts, habits or propensities until we strike the very heart of evil, our self-life, where the little "I" is exalted and made king, and everything made tributary to our own will, pleasure or honor.

HUMAN SELFISHNESS.

2. Self lives on the selfishness of others, and uses the same principle in them for the gratification of its ends. Abimelech appealed to the men of Shechem by ties of race and blood, and by the inducements of their own self-interest. And so self-aggrandizement becomes a web of countless coils woven and interwoven with the selfishness of others, until hand joins in hand, and a thousand chords of mutual self-interest bind together political parties, commercial monopolies, criminal confederacies, and the baneful associations of evil men which so largely constitute human society. Each is bound to the other by his own selfishness, and the man who knows best how to play with the selfish passions of others makes them all tributary to his own needs, while the devil sits supreme as king over all. When you see a man appealing to the selfishness of oth-

ers you may be very sure that he is selfishness incarnate.

DEVILISH.

3. We see self in partnership with Satan. Abimelech goes to the house of idols and gets the means for his unholy war from the temple of Baal. The devil is always ready to advance the funds to carry out any scheme of human selfishness. He is a very liberal investor in selfish trusts and sinful monopolies. You can always get money for a political campaign and a whiskey trust even when missionary societies are threatened with bankruptcy. Millions and millions of dollars are being thrown away every day in Satan's investments and sin's co-operative societies, and the cause of Christ is languishing by reason of the selfishness of its followers. The devil has his providences as well as the Lord, and the man who wants to plunge into the depths of Satan will find plenty of capital waiting his call and wonder often at his own success.

THE INSTRUMENTS.

4. The devil not only provides the means, but also the men. And so Abimelech soon

finds a lot of rascals ready to follow him and do his bidding. Alas, there are plenty of such men still to be found! They swarm on every side waiting for employment. They are recruiting by thousands; and a hundred to one they are to be found at every corner, as compared with the volunteers we seek for Christ. They are the peril of modern society, and some day they will rise in myriad swarms like the Vandals who swallowed up old Rome, and in the dark tribulation days will capture this world for Satan. Selfishness is ever ready to use them as its minions, and things that some men would not do themselves they are willing to let these sons of Belial do. There are many that sit in the high places with kid-gloved hands and polished manners who never perhaps shed a drop of human blood, nor soiled their feet and hands with the grosser forms of crime; but they are murderers and criminals all the same, and they do not hesitate to use the basest tools to carry out their purpose; and some day they shall stand red-handed and pale with agony as David in the hour when God proved him guilty of another's crime.

ITS CRUELTY.

5. Next we see self unmasking itself and sinking to the depths of cruelty to accomplish its purpose. Abimelech never stops until his hands are imbrued in the blood of his own brothers, and sixty-nine of his own father's children, boys that played with him in childhood, have been butchered on the very stone where the angel half a century before had accepted Gideon's offering. Perhaps Abimelech had no idea, when he began, of being a fratricide; but he was, all the same. When a burglar enters the house of his victim his direct object is not to murder, but he is armed for the worst, and if murder is necessary to accomplish his design or protect himself he is not going to shirk it; and so, when we start out upon the pathway of selfishness and sin, only the mercy of God can keep us back from the utmost extremity of evil and iniquity. Well may we all thank God that we have not been left to go farther than we have.

SHORT-SIGHTED.

6. Next, we see the foolishness and shortsightedness of selfishness. How vividly Jotham

brings all this out in his exquisite parable of the Bramble King! The Olive Tree did not want to be a king because it would cost much to leave the fatness of its fruit and the richness of its soil for the empty honor of waving over the other trees. The Fig Tree had no desire for a glory that would rob it of its sweetness. The Vine was too sensible to sacrifice its luscious grapes and its reviving wine, which even God appreciated, and which was a blessing to man, for the sake of a brief preeminence over other trees. The only shrub that could be found willing even to consider the proposition of royal honors was a little thorny bramble, which had no fruit to sacrifice, no blossoms to lose, and no real business in life but to be a nuisance and torment to others. And so the Bramble enters into negotiations with the trees with a view to its coronation as their king. It expresses a little courteous surprise and scepticism about their sincerity in appealing to it, and almost suggests that they would not have come if they could have gone anywhere else, and then adds, with a touch of sarcasm: "If, in truth, you anoint me king over you, then come

and put your trust in my shadow." The bramble means business. If it is to be a king it insists on the complete subjection of all the other trees under its thorny scepter. If a bramble could smile, this one must have smiled at the mention of its own "shadow." And then it adds with a deeper touch of sincerity: "And if not," now it is really speaking out its honest thought and intention, "let fire go out from the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon."

But now to return to our point. We see how little attraction supremacy had for the olive, the fig tree and the vine. They had something better to do than to rule over others. They had a mission of beneficence, sweetness and service; and a man anointed with the Holy Ghost, and fed on the sweetness of Christ and bearing fruit for God and man, is not craving after self-aggrandizement. Empty glory can never fill the human heart; vanity and pride are no substitutes for the joy of the Lord, the fullness of the Spirit and the sweet rest we find at Jesus' feet. A life of holy service for others is much more delightful than receiving and seeking their honor.

Let us not be so foolish as to waste our lives in such pursuits as the bramble. The society queen is earning a broken heart. The ambitious political leader is laying up for himself the disappointments of a baffled ambition, and perhaps the curse of an evil conscience and an avenging God. God made us for Himself and for the ministry of love. Let us give no place to that wretched self which is but a sapling out of Satan's root. A bramble by nature, it has been a curse to us as it will be to everybody else.

SELF-DESTROYING.

7. We see the evil fruition of self as it works out in the destiny of others and then reacts in our own destruction. Abimelech's life is the historical fulfilment of Jotham's parable. For a little while the bramble king seemed like an olive or a fig tree. His thorns are not yet fully grown. For three years Abimelech seemed to do fairly well. So self hides its sting for a while, and under its nice manners and winning smile it almost looks like an angel; but when the test comes the sheathed claws appear, and the slumbering serpent awakes with its en-

venomed sting. The men of Shechem had harbored a serpent in their bosom who was going to sting their lives to death. What an awful picture of treachery and destructiveness! Abimelech oppresses the Shechemites, and the Shechemites attempt to dethrone Abimelech, in turn to be themselves consumed and destroyed by his vengeance, until he at last is destroyed in the final turn of the wheels of retribution.

How true are the Apostle's words, "If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." A selfish spirit is a torment to everybody, and at last the greatest curse to itself. Like the scorpion, it spends its life in stinging others, and then at last it gathers up itself and with one final effort stings itself to death. So many a woman has destroyed the honor and purity of others, and then has hurled herself into the dark abyss. So many a man has gone on corrupting innocence with his heartless selfishness, and then become himself the avenger of his crimes.

It is not possible for selfishness to make anybody else happy, and it is still less possible for it to make its possessor happy. It is a bramble

by nature, and its only end must be the crackling thorns and the consuming flame. Old Aesop gave its true character in his instructive fable of a fox, who, falling down a precipice, clung to a bramble to break his fall, and found that the bramble had torn him worse than the fall. He turned to it in anger and disappointment and reproached it for its deceitful cruelty, and the bramble honestly replied, "How can anybody expect to catch hold of me, when the business of my life is to catch hold of others?"

Oh, may God open our eyes to see the curses of selfishness! If there is one thing in us that seeks for honor and glory it is a bramble, and it can only bring us misery and the flames of judgment. Let us repudiate it and follow the life of holy beneficence, and find our rich reward in the sweet, divine joy of holy usefulness.

How shall we be saved from the curse of selfishness? Let us gaze on two pictures:

THE CURSE OF EDEN.

Let us look back at Eden's gate and see the bramble. Alas, it is the symbol of our curse; it is the fruit of sin; it is the first outcome of

man's sad fall. "Thorns and thistles shall the earth bring forth to thee until thou return to dust, whence thou wast taken." And so the bramble stands as a representation of man's sin and God's curse. Shall we make it our king? Shall we join hands with Satan, whose own fall began with selfishness and pride? Oh, shall we not rather turn our back upon it for the Tree of Life in the midst of the Paradise of God?

THE CROSS OF CALVARY.

Then let us take another look and gaze on Calvary. What is this that lacerates our Saviour's brow and wreathes His gentle face with such a rude, tormenting crown? Ah! it is the old bramble again; it is the crown of thorns. What are those drops of blood that stain His face, and the tears that mingle with them and flow down His cheeks? Ah! they are the brambles of my selfishness; they are the thorns of my pride. It was this selfish "I" that I let not only crush my fellows, but even murder my Lord. It was not only for our sins He died, but it was for our selfishness, and in that death we die.

Ah! that is the secret of victory over self. "We thus judge that if One died for all, then all died. He died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him that died for them and rose again."

Then I turn the picture round, and yet I see the vision of Hope in that thorny crown of His. I see the thorns and brambles of my selfishness fastened to His Cross, and I know that I, as well as my sin, am dead indeed. The man that was is now no more. I have nailed him to the cross with my Lord. There he hangs upon the bowed head of my Redeemer. I am a new man born out of heaven, united with the risen Christ; no longer I, but Christ that liveth in me. And now, like Christ, my place is to live the life of self-renouncing love, and win the highest place by forgetting all about place and seeking only to serve and bless. Blessed Master, help us thus to cease to be, and let Thee be in us instead of us, so that it shall be truly, "No more I, but Christ who liveth in me."

CHAPTER VII.

JEPHTHAH, OR THE FAITH THAT LEADS TO FAITHFULNESS

“Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt. xxv. 21; Judg. xi. 30-36).

THE story of Jephthah illustrates with great power two important principles in the divine economy. The first is that God uses the things that are despised to confound the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. The second principle is, that God not only wants men who can trust Him, but men whom He can trust.

HIS BIRTH.

Jephthah was born a child of misfortune. Through no fault of his, the bar sinister was upon his life, and he was cast out as a poor bastard boy, despised by his brethren, forsaken by his family and thrown upon the cold mercies of the world. In most persons this engenders a spirit of misanthropy and bitterness, and

often develops into hard and heartless unbelief and ungodliness.

How natural it is to say, "What is the use of trying? Everything and everybody is against me; the very heavens are hostile, and either there is no God or there is no God for me; religion is for the fortunate and favored ones. I am a child of cruel fate, and as everybody is against me, I shall be against everybody, except as I can use them for my own advantage." This is the natural development of human character apart from the grace of God. But grace always proves an exception to every ordinary and natural law. And so in Jephthah's case we find this poor little child of shame and wrong rising through the pressure of unfavorable circumstances to stronger elements of character and nobler qualities of life, and wringing strength and success from the very difficulties that threaten to crush him. This was not through mere personal qualities in Jephthah, but it was undoubtedly through the grace of God, for we find Jephthah a man of deep devotion and intense fidelity to God.

His life resembles another eccentric one, of

which we read in the Book of Chronicles, that of Jabez. His name signifies "sorrow," and he when born was such a little wizened abortion, that his mother called him "Jabez," expressive of the sorrow that he had caused her. And so Jabez was thrown into life as a little miserable good-for-nothing, but when he grew old enough to think and pray, he turned from his distressing circumstances to his God, and we read of him this glorious chapter: "Jabez called upon the Lord God and said: 'Oh, that Thou wouldst bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!'" And it is added, "God granted him that which he requested."

So it was with Jephthah; when all else forsook him then the Lord took him up, and, trusting in Jehovah, he lived to have a glorious revenge upon his unkind people by bringing them a blessing instead of the curse that they had given him.

We have a little touch of his character in the name he gave his new home. He called it the land of Tob.

Tob means "good," and this is but a little

straw to tell how the wind blew in Jephthah's life.

We read of another man later in Hebrew history who called a certain land that Solomon gave him, "Cabul." Now, Cabul means "disagreeable." Poor Hiram looked at his country through the green glasses of discontent, and everything was green; but Jephthah looked at his land in the golden light of faith and hope, and all was bright.

Beloved, God wants His people to be delivered from sorrow just as much as from sin. Israel's long and sad failure in the wilderness all began in the spirit of discontent, and, "as it were," murmuring. They did not murmur outright, but they, "as it were," murmured, and from this they went on until the climax was rebellion and judgment, the loss of Canaan and the curse of God. There is in the spirit of gloom, sadness and discontent a morbid and unwholesome touch just as defiling as actual sin. It chills the whole temperature of the spiritual life, and hurts every plant of faith and love. One breath of frost in Florida destroys the orange crop for years, and one touch of

morbidness and selfish sentimental sorrow will not only chill our own spirit, but will depress everybody that we come in contact with, and lower the temperature of a whole community of happy Christians. Let us live in the "land of Tob," and let us accept the fulness of His atonement, who not only bore our sins and sicknesses but our sorrows, too.

HIS NAME.

The name of Jephthah himself is significant. It means "God opens," and it expresses, no doubt, the trust which looked to Jehovah to open his way and clear his path of all difficulties and trials until the valley of Achor became the door of hope, and the thorns and thistles of sorrow became the myrtles and the palms of victory.

Next we find Jephthah surrounded with a most unfavorable set of comparisons. The narrative calls them "vain fellows." They were the outcasts of society, and men who had been thrown as waifs upon the current of life and they naturally gravitated to a stronger center like Jephthah. Now, such companions are

not favorable to the development of the highest character.

How often we hear people complaining that others have led them to do wrong. And yet we find in the story of the Bible that many of God's noblest lives are moulded through the very influence of uncongenial associations. Joseph grew to the very pinnacle of moral greatness in defiance of the people around him. David, in his exiled years, was surrounded by the outlaws and outcasts of Israel, but through the power of his own personality and the grace of God that was with him, these men became transformed into his noblest followers and friends, and afterward were made the very princes of His kingdom. So the Lord Jesus Christ takes us, a company of poor, worthless sinners and things that are despised, and, by the transforming power of His grace, He lifts us into His own likeness, and crowns us with His own glory. And so, as we are thrown into the society of evil men, be it ours to lift and ennoble them, and instead of letting them draw us down let us lift them up to the mounts of blessing, where God has set us, in order that

we may be the lights of a dark world and shine the brighter through the very darkness that surrounds us.

They tell of a good Methodist preacher in England, who was arrested and put in jail because of his street preaching. He prayed so loud that the very authorities of the jail were glad to get him out. There is no place, and there is no society where we may not live the life of Christ and receive the glory of His indwelling. There is no depth of sin and misery so great but that He can lift us up, and turn our sorrow into joy and our curse into a blessing.

Still, He uses the "base things of the world and things that are despised, yea, and things that are not, to bring to naught the things that are, that no flesh may glory in His presence." And so the day came when Jephthah's brothers were glad to send for him to be their deliverer, and Jephthah had the high honor of returning good for evil, and saving the people that once despised him. This is the way that God loves to vindicate us—to make us a blessing to those that hated us and wronged us. His promise is,

"I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

HIS FAITH.

When Jephthah responded to their appeal, and came for their help, we see in his very words and acts the spirit of godliness and a lofty faith. We are told explicitly that all his words to his own people were "before the Lord." He spoke as in Jehovah's presence. And so when he sent his challenge to his enemies, it was couched in language of the loftiest faith. He repelled their claim by reminding them how they had treated Israel in the wilderness and forced a conflict, and then how God had taken their land and given it up to His own people, and destroyed the power of Og and Sihon, their giant kings. And now Jephthah referred the battle once more to Jehovah, and went against his adversaries in the name of Jehovah God. The battle was not his, but the Lord's, and such faith never can be confounded. It was not long before Jephthah returned in triumph from the slaughter of his enemies. His country was delivered, his claims vindicated, and his enemies were destroyed.

HIS FAITHFULNESS.

But now we see in Jephthah another lesson, not only of the loftiest faith, but the sublimest faithfulness. In the hour of peril he had vowed a vow unto Jehovah, pledging that when he returned in victory the first object that he met should be dedicated to the Lord, an offering to Him. As he came back amid the acclamations of universal triumph, the first who met him when he approached his home was his beautiful daughter, and as he realized all that his vow meant he was overwhelmed for a moment with the deepest emotion. But not for an instant did he hesitate in his firm and high purpose, nor once did that dear child shrink back from the sacrifice imposed upon her, but stood nobly with her father, demanding that he should fulfil his vow to the utmost, and together they stood true to their covenant God.

HIS VOW.

There has been much discussion as to the real meaning of Jephthah's vow, and the real fate of Jephthah's daughter; but there are several passages and constructions which can leave

no doubt in the mind of a candid reader that it was not a literal human sacrifice that Jephthah offered, and that that fair child was not slain upon the altar like the children of Ammon before their god of fire, but that her fresh life was given in all its purity as a living sacrifice of separation and service to Jehovah.

In the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy we find the most solemn warning given to Israel against imitating in the least degree the cruel and wicked rites of the Ammonites, especially in offering human sacrifices. Now these Ammonites were the very people against whom Jephthah had gone forth to war, and as a godly follower of Jehovah he must have been familiar with the commandments of the book of Deuteronomy. For him, therefore, to directly disobey these solemn injunctions would have been to prove false to all his character and all the meaning of his victory in the name of Jehovah.

Again, in the twelfth chapter of Exodus, it is clearly taught that the firstborn of Israel were all to be recognized as the Lord's, and liable, therefore, to death, like the Egyptian firstborn.

But, instead of their lives being literally required, they were redeemed by the blood of a lamb, and the Paschal lamb was offered instead of the life of the Hebrew, and that life was still regarded as wholly the Lord's, given to Him in living consecration, of which the whole tribe of Levi was regarded as the type, and, therefore, it was separated unto the service of the Lord as a substitute for the lives of the firstborn.

A LIVING SACRIFICE.

In all this was clearly taught the lesson that what God required from His people was not a dead body, but a "living sacrifice." It is much harder to live for God than to die for God. It takes much less spiritual and moral power to leap into the conflict and fling a life away in the excitement of the battle than it does to live through fifty years of misunderstanding, pain and temptation. It would have been easier for Jephthah's daughter to have lain down amid the flowers of spring, the chants and songs of a religious ceremonial, the tears and tributes of the people who loved her, and know that her name would be forever enshrined, than to go

out from the bright circle of human society and all the charms of youth and beauty and domestic and social delight, and live as a recluse for God alone, giving up the dearest hope of every Hebrew woman, not only to be a mother, but to be the mother of the promised Christ; giving up also, along with her father, the fond desire of a son to share his honor and his scepter, to prolong his name. All this it meant. This was the sacrifice she made. And so we read that she did not go aside to bewail her approaching death, but she went aside for two months to bewail her "virginity," the loneliness of her own life—then she gladly gave her life a living sacrifice to God.

There are several other considerations that might be added if necessary to establish this construction of the passage. It is enough to briefly refer to the fact that the phrase in verse thirty-nine is in the future tense, and refers to her future virginity, and not her past, and also that the translation of the fortieth verse in one of our versions is that the daughters of Israel went yearly "to talk" with the daughter of Jephthah four times in a year. It is not

necessary to pursue the argument farther. Enough for our present purpose that we catch the inspired lesson. That lesson is supreme, unqualified, unquestioning fidelity to God. Jephthah is the man that can depend upon God, but Jephthah is also the man upon whom God can depend.

God is looking for such lives, and on such men He will put the weight of His highest service and His eternal glory. God help each of us to be such a man of whom the Psalmist says, "He sweareth to his own hurt, and he changeth not."

HIS DAUGHTER.

How tender and beautiful the lesson which this passage gives to the young as well as the old! Just as Isaac stands out in the older story in a light as glorious as Abraham in yonder sacrifice on Mount Moriah, so Jephthah's daughter's sacrifice must not be forgotten in the honor we pay her father. Sweet child of single-hearted consecration! God help her sisters and her followers to be as true. Oh, beloved, do not wait until desire shall fail and age chill the pulses of ardent youth, and the

world will fall away from you itself, but when the flowers are blooming, and the cup is brimming, and the heart beats high with earthly love and joy and hope, then it is so sweet, it is so wise, it is so rare, to pour all at His blessed feet, as Mary poured her ointment on His head, and some day to receive it back amid the bloom and joys of yonder land, where they that have forsaken friends and treasures, fond affections and brightest prospects for His dear sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall have the still richer joy of knowing that they have learned His spirit and understood His love.

CHAPTER VIII.

SEPERATION AND STRENGTH—A LESSON FROM THE LIFE OF SAMSON

“Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you” (II. Cor. vi. 17). Compare Judges, chapters xiii. to xvi.

THE story of Samson is an illustration of this text. The principle of which Samson's life is a sad embodiment is set forth in the symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, the iron and clay mixed together, and the image partaking of the strength of the iron, but also, alas, of the weakness of the clay. This is the story of Samson—divine strength mingled with human weakness, supernatural power hindered by the touch of earth and the taint of sin.

THE VISION.

The story of Samson forms one of the closing chapters of the period of the Judges. He had godly parents. The Lord appeared in

a vision and promised the birth of a son, accompanying it with the most solemn injunctions—first, that the mother should be separated according to the law of the Nazarites before his birth; and, then, that the child that should be born should also be a Nazarite from his birth and separated unto God from his mother's womb.

THE NAZARITE.

In due time the child was born and carefully brought up according to the divine command. His hair was allowed to grow in perfect naturalness, and he abstained from wine and all strong drink, and lived a life of abstinence and purity. On arriving at manhood the Spirit of God began to move upon him in the form of extraordinary physical strength. Along with this began the peculiar temptation of his life—a tendency to self-indulgence and unhallowed associations with the daughters of the Philistines. This, at last, became the snare that ruined him.

HIS FIRST ERROR.

His first error was to set his affections upon a Philistine maiden of Timnath, and to marry

her contrary to the advice and wishes of his parents. On his way to her home he performed the first great exploit of his life—the slaying of a lion in a thicket by the way. This marriage was a sad one, and ended in the murder of his bride and the family by the Philistines, followed by his retaliation upon the enemies of his country and the burning up of their cornfields by an army of blazing foxes that he sent across the country.

HIS TRIUMPHS.

For twenty years he was the terror of his enemies. He used to boldly visit their towns and hamlets, usually in some doubtful associations with one of their women, but he defied their attempts to take him; until at last, through the snare of Delilah, to whom he had rashly given his love and confidence, he was betrayed into revealing the secret of his strength and fell into the hands of his foes, who bound him and put out his eyes and then immured him for the rest of his life in a solitary dungeon.

HIS FAILURE.

There he deeply repented of his sin and fol-

ly, and God heard his prayer and gave him one more opportunity to use his colossal strength for God and his country in the last act and tragedy of his life, the pulling down of the vast amphitheater, in which he had been led forth to make sport for the Philistines, and he and his enemies together perished at the last; but those that he slew at his death were more than all those he slew in his life.

He passed out of Jewish history—a marvelous example of what God might have done with a thoroughly separated man, and yet of what self-indulgence and sin can do to hinder the most glorious promise and the most gracious purpose of God.

A GOOD BEGINNING.

I. We see a bright beginning, full of glorious promise and possibility. We see God choosing a human life and revealing a high and mighty purpose for a human career, and then we see all this hindered and defeated by earthliness, selfishness and sin. What more could God have done to show His purpose of love and blessing? Twice He came in vision to announce the birth of Samson, and again

and again He manifested His supernatural power in the life of His servant, and the mighty possibilities which He was ready to accomplish if He could only have found an obedient and faithful instrument; and yet all this was baffled and hindered by the disobedience and folly of the man whom He had sought to bless and use.

It is a very solemn and awful thing to think how we can hinder God's purposes of love for us. Oh, ye, who have been born of holy parentage; ye, whose childhood has been environed with every holy association and every godly influence; ye, who are the children of a mother's prayers and a father's faith; ye, whose early days have been overshadowed by the very wings of the Almighty, and whose inner consciousness has felt the touch of heaven and heard the whisper of your high calling; remember that, after all this, you may, by your wilfulness and folly, destroy even your own blessing and hear your Master say at last, as He said to His own of old, "How often would I, but ye would not."

SEPARATION.

2. We see the necessity of a life of separation and entire consecration, if we would become the vessels of the Holy Spirit and the instruments of God's highest blessing. The Nazarite, under the Mosaic institutions, was the peculiar type of a life of separation. He was set apart from his childhood to be dedicated peculiarly unto the Lord and separated from all earthly and sensual indulgences. Just as the priest represented the idea of nearness to God, the Nazarite and the Levite represented the idea of separation to God.

This is one of the profoundest principles of God's whole plan of redemption. From the very beginning God purposed to separate a peculiar people unto Himself. We see this in the separation of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Israel and the Church of Christ, which just means the called-out ones. The very name "Ekklesia" signifies "the separated ones." Man's failure to meet God's thought in this has been the cause of all the failures and disasters of the past. The awful wickedness which preceded the flood was brought about

from the mingling of the holy seed with the people of this world, the intermarriage of the children of God with the daughters of men. And in these times the same cause is about to produce similar effects. There is a melting away and a breaking down of all barriers between the Church and the world, and the end of it is going to be a condition of things as shocking and terrible as in the days of Noah, and the progeny of such frightful and monstrous unions will once more bring upon the earth a deluge, not of water, but of fire, to sweep the godless race away.

God must have separated vessels. He will not drink out of the devil's cups. We must not only be His, but His alone, bear His monogram, and be His peculiar people. Oh, ye, who bear the name of Jesus and are playing with the world, receiving its attentions, intermarrying with its people, allowing it to invade the very Church of Christ and in the name of religion turn God's holy sanctuary into a place of social entertainment and sometimes indecent exhibitions that would even disgrace a theater, you are opening the flood-

gates of the coming judgment; you are inoculating the body of Christ with the very poison of leprosy; you are draining all the fountains of spiritual life and power; you are repeating the story of Samson, and the end can only be the same that came at last to him—blindness, bondage, paralysis and death. “Wherefore, come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

DIVINE LIFE FOR THE BODY.

3. We see in Samson a picture of the supernatural life and power that God can give to a consecrated body. Samson was not a physical giant; at least, there is no reason to suppose this. The Philistines could not understand his supernatural strength. If he had been like Og or Sihon or Goliath, of gigantic stature, they would easily have comprehended it, but he seems to have been a man of ordinary appearance and his power was entirely superhuman. It was not through brawn or bone, but it was because of the divine life that possessed

his being and filled his frame with the very strength of God. Just as the electric wire, when filled with the current, has in it the whole power of the battery and can turn the ponderous wheels of a mighty factory, so a human frame may be so possessed with the Holy Ghost that the feeblest may be like David, and David like the angel of the Lord.

There is no doubt that David attributed his stupendous exploits entirely to the physical strength that came to him from Jehovah. His battles were all battles of faith, and he could literally say, "He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms." We have seen the power of demoniacal possession sometimes in a human body, so that an insane man had the strength of a dozen men. Why should not the Holy Ghost be able to give the same power to a human arm?

And so Samson was able to wrench asunder the jaws of the lion, as he would a kid, to carry on his shoulders the pillars and gates of Gaza with their weight of tons and walk with them ten miles to Hebron, and to lift up the pillars which supported the vast amphitheater

and literally tear the building to pieces by his arms.

So, still, God is able to put His strength into a human frame, if wholly separated unto Him, so that it can resist the power of disease; can throw off the influence of a poisonous climate; can endure hardship and suffering, and can go through life, like Moses, with unabated strength until life's work is done. The Holy Spirit has this for His separated ones in these last days. It is part of the purchase of Christ's redemption and the partnership of His resurrection and ascension power, and if we are but empty of all that hinders and open to His unrestricted life and power He will dwell in us, and make us to know the exceeding greatness of His power to usward, "according to the working of His mighty power which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenlies."

But not only was Samson an example of physical power, but also of God's supernatural working in the circumstances and providences of life. When he was ready to faint with thirst

after the victory over the Philistines when he had slain a thousand of them with the jawbone of an ass, he cried to God in his extremity, and God opened a fountain of water until he was satisfied. There is a realm of natural forces and providential surroundings where faith may still claim the interposition of our Almighty Lord in all the emergencies and circumstances of life. While the Spirit dwells within us as the Source of every needed grace, the Son of God is reigning on His Father's right hand. He has said to His disciples, "All power is given unto Me, in heaven and in earth; and, lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age." This mighty Christ is able to do anything for us that we really need in the line of His purpose for us and the work He has committed to our hands. Are we proving all the power of Jesus' name and all the possibilities of the Spirit-filled life?

THE TOUCH OF EARTH.

4. We see the withering touch of earthliness and sin. Very gradually did the poison insinuate itself into Samson's life; very gradually did he allow the snare of temptation to weave

its meshes around him, until at last he was a bound and helpless captive in the power of his destroyer.

First comes the visit to the enemy's country. He had no business to go down to Timnath in the first place, except as God might send him as a soldier and as a judge; but he went, and then he looked, and then he loved, and then he longed, and then disobeyed his parents' counsel, and then he took the fatal step which linked his life with the daughter of his enemies.

Yet God did not forsake him immediately. Again and again He showed His power with His servant through a score of years and helped him out of his troubles, and doubtless often spoke to his heart and warned him of his danger and folly. But Samson still went on in the same self-indulgent course, only getting, as we always do, deeper and deeper into the mire of lust, until at last we find him at Gaza in the house of a woman of ill repute, and at last we see him in the valley of Sorek in the lap of Delilah, who represents the world's delights and the very abandonment of selfish pleasure.

But even there an instinct of self-preservation and peculiar sacredness seems to have lingered to the last. This evil woman, Satan's masterpiece of temptation, had been urged by the enemies of God and of Samson to find out the secret of his strength. They had offered her a bribe of three thousand dollars, which in those days was worth ten times that sum. It would secure her affluence and honor. And for this she sold herself, and determined that Samson should sell himself, too. With wily tact and womanly pleading she began begging him from day to day to tell her his secret, and, at last, appealing to his nobler nature, to his manly, generous impulses, to his love, she told him that if he loved her truly he would trust her without reserve.

Ah, it was his heart that betrayed him at last! Dear one, perhaps you think you did not mean any great wrong. You never intended to yield your principles, your virtue, your conscience, but they did get the better of you; you trusted somebody and in a moment of impulse you were lost. So poor Samson fell. So it is that the lost sheep ever goes astray. It is

just a foolish sheep. It wanders, it forgets, it dallies and it perishes all the same.

“Evil is wrought by want of thought
More than by want of heart.”

Oh, how tragical is the picture of Samson's last temptation and fatal fault! Oh, how the fingers of the devil felt for his very heart, closer and closer, until at last they stole his secret and crushed out his life. He knew that there was danger and he played with it, day by day, putting it off and still holding the citadel, but letting the enemy come nearer and nearer, as he told her that they might bind him with green withes and he would be helpless; and then she betrayed her true character, and he might have seen the fiend in the fond lover, as she called his cruel foes. Hastily, Samson sprang to his feet and tore his bonds asunder, and drove them from his presence in dismay. Next, he told her that they might bind him with fresh cords and he would be helpless. And then, again, in the test, the cords tore asunder, and she fell, hysterically weeping, and told him that he did not love her, and pleaded for his confidence; and then his heart

was touched, and, oh, how near he grazed to the very edge of the precipice! One trembles when one hears him talk of his Nazarite locks, and tell her that if she would weave them together he would be bound and helpless; and so she weaves them and pins them in a knot, and takes the pin of a weaver's loom to fasten them securely. And now she thinks she has him, and, again, the ambush of men is sprung upon him, and again Samson springs through the meshes of his snare, and, perhaps, seizes the pin of the loom to beat them from his presence. How narrowly he has escaped! If he had but taken the warning! Oh, if he had but listened to the throbbings of his heart when the Spirit knocked! But a woman's tears and a woman's hysterical pleadings at last conquered Samson's own weak heart. God's hour of longsuffering had reached its margin, not through Samson's triumph, but through Samson's failure; and the man who might have been a lighthouse on the shores of time must become a beacon on the sunken rock and the dangerous reef, warning others to avoid the place where he was lost. So, at last, the strong man bows; the surrender

is made; the secret is told. Doubtless, he exacted from her the most sacred pledge, and she vowed she would never tell it. Doubtless she swore all that he wanted her to keep his secret, but she had him lulled to sleep and the locks were shaven; the bribe was in her hands and the enemy was upon him. Samson rose, as before, and shook himself as at other times, and thought he was as strong as ever. He knew not that the Lord had departed from him. The awful progression is completed. Lust hath conceived and hath brought forth sin, "and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

THE RETRIBUTION.

5. Samson's retribution was as terrible as his sin.

(a) He lost his strength, and spiritual paralysis always follows surrender to temptation and compromise with evil.

(b) Next, he lost his liberty. He was bound and helpless in the hands of his foes. When once we yield to the enemy we have no power to keep from yielding again. Our defence is departed from us, and we are "given over to a reprobate mind to do those things that are not

convenient." Eternal sin is the most terrible part of eternal punishment.

(c) He lost his sight. When we yield to sin and Satan our eyes are put out by our enemies, and we cease to know the difference between right and wrong. Our once clear conceptions of God's high and holy will are blurred and blotted out, and we wander in the darkness, not knowing at what we stumble.

(d) He became a sport and spectacle for his enemies, and they used him to grace their entertainments, to be a public mockery at their revels, to honor their false gods and put to shame the very name of the God he loved. The most terrible part of Samson's punishment was to hear the shouts of his enemies as they boasted of the triumphs of Dagon over Jehovah and the defeat of Samson and Samson's God, he knowing all the while that it was his sin and folly that caused all this shame to the name of Jehovah, and the cause that he, above all other men, was sent to guard.

HIS RESTORATION.

But at last repentance and contrition came, and, in his humiliation, bondage and sorrow,

Samson at last awoke to the meaning of his life and asked God for one more chance to be true. To prove his sincerity and the deep reality of the death of self, he was willing to sacrifice his very life in his last exploit, and he only asked of God that he might die in the service of his country and in the destruction of his enemies. He was like the Roman nobleman that plunged full armed into the chasm at the city gate, which none but he could fill. He was like the soldier, who, having betrayed his colors, asked only that he might once more lead the forlorn hope on the battlefield, and die with his colors in his bloody hand and his life laid down in the midst of his enemies. Our service is never worth anything until our life goes with it, and everything is laid down, even life itself, if God requires it. Samson has always been looking after his own pleasure, but now, at last, Samson is dead to self and ready for the noblest achievement of his life.

God takes him at his word, and one day in the height of a great national carnival, while hundreds of thousands of Philistia's nobles are crowding the galleries of the vast amphi-

theater, whose roof is supported by two great pillars in the center, and all are waiting for Samson to come forth and make sport for them in his blindness, Samson's strength is given back to him for one last achievement; gripping the mighty pillars, with one stupendous effort he tears them from their foundations, and with a crash of thunder and ten thousand cries of terror the building is in ruins and the proud boast of the Philistines is turned into a death shriek of despair. Samson is victor in his death, and has accomplished more by dying than he had done in all his twenty years of living.

Beloved, by Samson's death scene let us learn to die to self and sin, and then we, too, shall "wax valiant in fight, turn to flight the armies of the aliens and out of weakness be made strong."

Nay, more, let us see in Samson's death the type of a greater than Samson, whose death accomplished also the destruction of His enemies and ours, and taught us both how to live and how to die. He died for us that we might live, but He died for us that we might die,

and in the power of His cross, with its holy sign translated into every fiber of our being and every service of our life, let us go forth to live for Him who died, in "the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death."

CHAPTER IX.

RELIGIOUS COMPROMISES—THEIR FOLLY AND FRUITS

“No man can serve two masters. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. vi. 24.) Compare Judges, chapters xvii and xviii.

THE remarkable incidents of these two chapters illustrate with great vividness the principles of our text. These chapters contain the story of Micah, and are a medley of sin and crime that not only condemn with the bitter irony of truth the follies and sins of the dark ages of the Judges, but apply with caustic severity and awful truthfulness to the social and religious abuses of our own times.

DISHONESTY.

I. We have a picture of dishonesty.

Micah, a young man of Mount Ephraim, steals from his mother eleven hundred shekels of silver, and for a time conceals his ill-gotten gain. At length, alarmed by her angry curses, he comes and repents and restores the money.

Here we see a very common picture ; dishonesty and crime commencing in the home circle, in the first penny stolen in secret from mother's drawer and leading to a life of lawlessness and crime.

Absolute righteousness in the minutest particular is essential to all religious character. We find a lack of righteousness today in the constitution of society, and singular corruption of conscience about right and wrong. There are men and women who can speak of deep religious experiences and extraordinary public services, who yet seem to be unable to appreciate the absolute necessity of strict integrity and uprightness in the matter of property, of debt and of business transactions between man and man.

PASSION.

2. We have here a picture of passion, in the story of Micah's mother. When she found her seven hundred dollars were lost, she was very angry, and she cursed so loud and so long that it seems to be the only thing remembered about the transaction. It made such an impression on Micah that he never got over it

until he restored the money; but the moment she saw her shekels again she forgot all about her passion, and even about the crime of her boy, and she fell into another passion of delight, and blessed him as extravagantly as she had cursed him before. "Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son." The old lady had a little streak of religion running through it all, and probably thought that she was a very good sort of woman. It never occurred to her to sit down, and tell her boy about his wickedness and lead him to true repentance. All she could think of was that she had got the shekels back.

How like many a mother, alternating between the passionate love and the passionate anger, which are both alike natural, animal and devilish!

FALSE CONSECRATION.

3. We see next a picture of counterfeit consecration.

"I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the Lord from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image." What a strange medley of religion and idolatry!

Micah's mother had plenty of religion, but it was not any good because it was mixed. The need of the world is not religion; all people have religion, and the less a man has of God the more he has of religion, as a rule. The pagans of Africa, the heathen of China, have far more religion than we have. They sacrifice and give and do far more in the service of their idols than we do for Christ, but it is the devil's religion. Back of all their idolatry, they, too, like Micah's mother, have a dim idea of the Lord, and will tell you that these images and fetiches are but forms and stepping stones through which they rise to the true God. A Roman Catholic who mumbles her rosary and counts her beads and looks up to the saints and images on her altar, and the Buddhist who talks about Nirvana, alike claim that they are doing it unto the Lord; and above all and behind all religions there is the same deep sense of God and desire to meet Him. But this does not make it any better. The motive does not make the forbidden act right.

And so in our religious ceremonialism, we may have much piety in building our chapels

and erecting our altars, and contributing to the costly machinery of our splendid rituals and keeping our fasts and our Lenten services; but it is idolatry all the same. Oh, what a surprise will await many a devoted worshiper when he finds in the last day that God has accepted none of his foolish sacrifices, and all his expenditure of money and time and bodily exercise has been as vain as the grossest idolatry of heathenism and the licentious orgies of Baal worship.

But notice in this old lady's consecration how she betrays herself by an act of real insincerity in the midst of her pretended sacrifice. "I had wholly dedicated the silver unto the Lord," she says, and yet, when it comes to business she takes only two hundred out of the eleven hundred shekels and keeps the rest. She was the grandmother of Ananias and Sapphira. She was not even honest in the little religion she had.

We see the same spirit in heathenism today. The Chinaman will try to cheat his god as openly as the Christian worshiper who puts a bad penny in the plate, if he can do it un-

noticed. It is the custom of the Chinese to offer clothing and articles of furniture at the graves of their ancestors. They are made of tissue paper and set on fire, that they may go up in smoke and reach the dead for their habiliments in the land of spirits, but I noticed that the Chinamen always made half a garment—one side of a pair of pants or jacket. The reason given was, the gods would not notice it and he would save the other half.

How natural it is to let self come into our very devotions, and how much we need the faithful admonition of Paul to his brethren at Corinth: "Now, therefore, perform the doing of it, that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have."

RITUALISM

4. A picture of ritualism.

Micah makes the image and sets it up in his idol temple, with a whole ritual of idolatrous worship. He has a house of gods and an ephod and teraphim, and, to make the whole thing complete, he consecrates one of his sons to be priest. It is all a piece of man-made religion.

Now, here is the point where the emphasis lies. Micah's religion was all manufactured according to his own patterns. And this is the essential defect of all forms of false religion—they are all man-made. It matters not whether they are the grossest idolatries of pagan nations, with their common fetichisms and priestly idols, or the licentious forms of gross idolatry, which but express the passions of the human heart, or the more artistic and ideal religious systems of more refined ages, with their Confucian morality, their Buddhist philosophy, or their ancient Vedas and Shastras; whether they be the dreams and pretended revelations of Mohammed and Joe Smith; whether they be the imposing ceremonials of the papacy, or whether they be the elaborate rituals of the modern Church; they are all but the thousand man-made forms of so-called worship. The essential fault of every one of them is that they are human, that they are based upon the traditions or inventions of man, and not upon the revealed word and authoritative commandment of Jehovah.

God's command to Moses was that he make

all things according to the pattern shown him in the Mount, and Christ's command to His disciples was an echo of it, teaching them "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." And, therefore, the devil has tried to get into the very Church of Christ, and institute a whole system of theological teaching and ceremonial worship that God never revealed nor commanded, and change the whole divine system of the Church into a piece of human machinery which he could manipulate at will.

How much of our religious work today is entirely human! Our revivals are gotten up by careful organization and artificial mechanism. Our worship is sustained at an enormous cost by trained performers who belong to the world, the flesh and the devil on six days, and for a consideration give a few hours to the Lord on the Sabbath. And much of our so-called religion is what the Apostle describes as "teaching for ordinances the commandments of men"; and, again, "ordinances which all are to perish with the using after the commandments and doctrines of men."

But after Micah had arranged his whole ritual, he felt that something was lacking. He wanted God to recognize his man-made church, and give it a touch of authority and sacredness. And so, one day there came along a young Levite from Bethlehem Judea, and sojourned a few days with him; and Micah, finding that he belonged to the Levitical line, invited him to become his priest and take charge of the temple and service that he had recently fitted up, and offered him a salary of ten shekels a year, equal to about \$6.40, besides a good suit of clothes and his board; and the young man considered the call, finally accepted it, and was installed as the hired preacher in Micah's church. Then Micah was at rest; he felt completely satisfied. He had got just enough of God in his man-made church to justify him in calling it a religious institution. And so he rubbed his hands with delightful self-complacency and said, "Now I know that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to be my priest."

And so men and women today are making up their various religious programs and want-

ing only to get ecclesiastical recognition, to get some Levite with real apostolic succession to countenance the thing, and it is all right, no matter whether God approves or disapproves; and, alas, it is only too easy to get ecclesiastical recognition for any form of doctrine or medley of so-called worship. Let a man of liberal mind and attractive personal qualities go forth among our people as a public teacher, and win their confidence and applause by his books and lectures, as one of our recent visitors from abroad has done, and then let him publish to the world a creed which could be accepted by a Unitarian, a Jew, yes, even a Spiritualist, as well as a Christian, if he is tactful enough in pointing his phrases and prudent enough in guarding his expressions, that man can stand as the acknowledged representative of the most conservative of the churches of Scotland and England, and be recognized as a true Levite. Let a man in the wild license of modern theological thought and the passion for freedom and originality cut up this Holy Bible with his penknife until nothing supernatural is left, and laugh away the Pentateuch and the Books

of Isaiah and Daniel, and yet he can secure the highest place in our theological seminaries, and be recognized as a star lecturer at our Christian conventions and retain his standing without challenge. Nay, let the very sanctuary and temple of God be prostituted to religious entertainments and exhibitions that would scarcely be counted decent on the stage, and the regular program of parish work include the weekly dance as well as the weekly prayer meeting, and yet it may all be canonical; and the members and officers of this man-made medley fold their arms in self-complacency, like Micah, and say, "It is all right, seeing I have a Levite to be my priest."

EVILS OF COMPROMISE.

5. We have a picture of the sad fruits of religious compromise. The sequel of the story of Micah is ironical and most tragical. A band of freebooters from the tribe of Dan pressing forward after new territory came to the house of Micah, and, finding his priest, asked counsel about their movements and were encouraged on their predatory expedition. They went forward, and finding a beautiful region, re-

turned to their own tribe and organized a powerful force, and these, following in the footsteps of the pioneer party, first came to the house of Micah, and stole his priest and his gods; and when he followed them, protesting and pleading, they coolly advised him to go home for fear he should get hurt, and marched on with his booty, leaving him only the cold comfort of their scorn. And then passing on, they invaded the peaceful territory that their pioneer party had discovered, and put the helpless villagers mercilessly to the sword, taking possession of their country where they, in turn, organized an idolatrous shrine and seat of worship which became in succeeding years the most corrupting influence in all the religious life of the nation. Thus we see Micah's sin and folly bearing fruit—first, in his own suffering and loss, and the ruin of all his cherished hopes and plans, and the very loss even of his religion; secondly, in the cruelty and wrong which swept away a whole defenceless community; and, thirdly, in the long-continued and baneful influences which it started and kept

in operation throughout all the centuries of Israel's history.

These are the effects of religious compromise and the sin of Micah in every age. First, they lead to the bitter disappointment and ruin of the worshiper, and the day surely comes when the devil will steal the worthless religion that he gave his wretched follower, and leave him nothing but scorn and despair. Secondly, superstition leads, and always will lead, to cruelty and crime. False religion becomes a persecutor and a destroyer of the rights and liberties of men. The two most cruel and destructive influences of medieval and modern history have been Mohammedanism and Romanism, and they are both forms of false religion, very similar in their history and religious principles to Micah's hybrid religion. The early conquerors of South America took possession of the land in the name of God, and even the very geographical names of the country today bear witness to their pretensions of piety, but the ruin of the aboriginal races and the degradation which still rests upon the land today, bear witness to their cruelty, rapac-

ity and wickedness. Thirdly, the leaven of false religion becomes a corrupting principle in all the future history of a people. Micah not only succeeded in corrupting his own family, but also in laying the foundation of evils that lasted to the latest age of their history and corrupted the whole nation, leading eventually to the captivity of the race and the sins and sorrows of threescore generations. And so when we defile the streams of divine truth and lie we poison a whole generation. When we plant the tares in the midst of the wheat, we leave behind us the seeds of thorns and thistles for the eternal burning. Men may think it a very innocent thing to play with "higher criticism" and toy with ritualism, but they are undermining the faith of their own children, they are kindling the incendiary fire that will burn up their altars and their homes, and they are pioneering the awful procession of anarchy, socialism, immorality, crime and the very horrors of lawlessness and wrong which will usher in the days of Antichrist and the catastrophe of the world.

CHAPTER X.

OUR KINSMAN REDEEMER—LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH

“Thy Maker is thy Husband and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel” (Isa. liv. 5).

THE Book of Ruth is really a part of the Book of Judges. It is a sort of vignette inserted on the background of that mingled picture of the dark ages of the Old Testament, and is thus a sort of companion picture to the one last given us, the story of Micah. Both are incidents gathered out of the same period of Hebrew history and illustrating the life of the people; the one on the dark, the other on the bright side.

There is another dark picture on the canvas which we have passed over. It is the shocking series of incidents recorded in the last three chapters of Judges, all growing out of a single unholy relationship. It is the story of a licentious woman destroyed at last by the very wickedness that she had herself pursued; and

of a sinful man who allowed her to draw him into her wicked life, and who, through her influence, became unfaithful to his high calling as priest of the Lord. Out of their relations grew, at length, a frightful crime which involved in a destructive civil war all the tribes of Israel—a war which did not cease until three armies had perished and one whole tribe in Israel had become almost extinct. So fearful are the consequences of even the slightest sin. How solemn and how true is that little verse in James which gives the pedigree of sin: “Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”!

But we pass over this dark picture, and we come to the story of Ruth. It is like a little oasis in a desert. Goethe has called it the finest poem in human language; and yet how few of the children of God really understand its beautiful meaning and teaching. It is said that a literary man once read it in an English drawing-room to a select company of cultivated people, slightly changing the principal names and the style of the story, but reading it substan-

tially as it is given in the Bible, and his audience was delighted with this new and wonderful literary production, and eagerly questioned him about its authorship and origin. They retired, with significant silence, when they learned that it was one of the books of their neglected Bible.

THE STORY.

It is scarcely necessary to recall the incidents of the story—the famine in Bethlehem, the emigrant family, Elimelech and his wife Naomi, with their two boys, Mahlon and Chilion. Then came the death of the father and the marriage of the two boys to two maidens of Moab, named Ruth and Orpah. And then, in due time, they died and the three widows were left alone in a foreign land. Then Naomi turned homeward, but with unselfish consideration, she tried to dissuade her daughters-in-law from the journey which promised so little for them or her. Orpah, the more demonstrative of the two, expressed great affection, and went home; but Ruth clung to Naomi with those ever memorable and noble words, which have been inscribed with the point of a dia-

mond as the loftiest expression of loyal affection and devotion: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

And so the two lone widows came back to Bethlehem and began to seek a livelihood in the humblest way. Ruth took upon herself, as a loving daughter, the support of the home, and went out, like Jewish maidens, to glean in the wheat and barley fields. It was there that she met Boaz, the rich farmer, who had heard of her kindness to her mother and her maidenly modesty and who became attracted to her, and showed her special kindness without sacrificing in any way her own womanly independence. Naomi, meanwhile, kept watching with motherly intuition the whole situation, looking constantly to God, in whose wings they had come to trust. At length, Naomi found that Boaz sustained to her and Ruth the peculiar relation

of the Goel, or nearest of kin, whose duty it was to redeem her husband's inheritance and take his widow to be his wife. Naomi advised Ruth to take the bold yet modest step by which she could claim her rights.

The sequel, we all know. Boaz recognized the claim, but kindly told her that there was another who had intervened; but, should he refuse to do the kinsman's part, he, Boaz, would be true. And so it came about that the nearest kinsman declined to do his part lest he should mar his own inheritance in merging his name in another family; and then Boaz stepped in, redeemed the inheritance of Elimelech and took Ruth as his bride; and out of this union came the birth of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David. And thus Ruth, the daughter of Moab, became the grandmother of David, and the ancestress of Jesus Christ, the Son of man and the King of kings.

DOMESTIC VIRTUE.

We see in this story some beautiful examples of domestic virtue and lofty character. How fine is the picture of Naomi, one of the much-abused class of mothers-in-law, who was,

indeed, a true mother, and who so wisely sought the interests of her children and deserved and gained their confidence and love.

Perhaps the sorest need of society today is true mothers, and the guilt of many a lost girl lies heavy on the soul of selfish, ignorant and unholy motherhood.

How beautiful is the character of Ruth; her filial love, how true; her maidenly modesty, how perfect! This is woman's finest jewel, and her most attractive quality in the eyes of every true man. This was what drew Boaz to her, because she went not after the young men, but clung to the maidens and stayed with her mother when her work was done.

The social freedom of our day is bound to bear its fruit in social corruption. "If she be a wall," says Solomon, "we will build upon her a palace of silver; and if she be a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar."

Then Ruth was an industrious maiden; she was not afraid of hard work. It is not a bad suggestion for our idle and pleasure-loving girls to know that it was in the harvest field that Boaz fell in love with her, and even when

he did, he let her stay in the harvest field, only making her work a little easier, but not for a moment destroying her independence by offering to provide for her without her own honest labor. Luther has well said, "The devil tempts men, but the idle man tempts the devil"; and this is just as true of woman as of man.

Above all is the piety of Ruth. It was not merely the love of her mother that made her true; but it was the love of her mother's God. Very finely Boaz alludes to it when he speaks of "the wings of the Almighty under which she has come to trust."

Just as fine, in his way, is the character of Boaz. He is wealthy and influential, but simply and unostentatiously he goes down to his field and works with the men, and yet he maintains his dignity and reserve, and holds his position without pride on the one hand or undue freedom on the other. How fine his chivalrous spirit and manly respect for Ruth! How delicate and thoughtful his kindness; just enough to encourage her, but not enough to hurt her self-respect! How just and upright his con-

duct in relation to the nearest of kin, giving him every chance to claim his right, although his own heart was so deeply interested in Ruth, and then meeting the obligation so nobly! And how manifest his deep piety and his recognition of the piety of Ruth and Naomi!

One of the finest evidences of lofty character is the power to discover the noble qualities of others, and we see in Boaz that fine touch that fully recognized the nobility of Ruth and Naomi, and was as honorable to him as it was to them.

What beautiful examples we find in this pastoral poem to mothers, to daughters, to maidens, to men, to all classes and ranks of society, especially in these days of social heartlessness, homelessness and selfishness!

DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

We have in this story a beautiful illustration of divine providence. We see God working in human affairs to carry out His divine purpose. We see Him overruling the sorrow of former days to bring about some greater blessing. Sorrowing one, He that watched over the lone widows of Bethlehem will some

day wipe your tears away, and make you even thank Him for the trials that now you cannot understand.

We see Him leading out that family, in order that through them He might lead in this daughter of a Gentile race, and make her a partner in the hopes of His people. We see Him fitting the times and seasons of our lives in bringing these wanderers back to Bethlehem just at the right time, the harvest season. We see His loving care of His children finally expressed in the beautiful figure of Boaz, "the wings of the Almighty." Under those sheltering wings His children still lie, and the God of the widow and the fatherless is not dead, but through each perplexing path of life He will guide their footsteps, providing for their need and safely leading them home.

REDEMPTION.

We have a type of redemption. In the helpless condition of Ruth we see the picture of our lost condition. Ruth was born of a Gentile race, and the race that was especially under the curse. Moab literally means "son of his father"; and we know that the tribe was de-

scended from the accursed union of Lot and his daughter. Ruth well represents the sinful state of God's redeemed people under the curse of a fallen race. She was not only a Gentile and a stranger, but she was a widow; her natural protector was gone, and her nearest kinsman who had the right to redeem her refused. How well she represents our helpless condition; not only lost, but none to help, and even the very Law, which came, as it seemed, to save, was helpless and unwilling to deliver the sinful soul.

But, in beautiful contrast with all this, how fine the picture of redemption unfolded in this Book! Under the Mosaic law, there is a statute providing for what are called Levirate marriages, under whose provisions a family name was not allowed to perish from the tribe; and so, when a man died, his brother was to take his wife and redeem his inheritance and raise up seed unto his brother. Now, under this provision, Elimelech and his sons having died, it was the right and duty of the nearest of kin to step in and save their inheritance and family name, and through the widow raise up seed

unto the dead husband. This, of course, involved the forfeiture of the kinsman's own family name, and marred his inheritance; but it was recognized as a patriotic and social duty, overriding personal considerations.

Now, this is just what Boaz did for Ruth, and what the nearer kinsman refused to do. Boaz merged his own personality and family in Ruth's family, making a real sacrifice, and thus he became her kinsman redeemer, and then, also, her husband.

This is the beautiful type of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Kinsman Redeemer. For us He has sacrificed His own divine rights. This is what the Apostle meant when he said, "That being in the form of God, He thought it not a thing to be eagerly grasped and retained that He should be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Christ gave up forever a place of dignity and right on yonder throne, where He was known

as God and God alone. Henceforth, He is forever known as Man, still divine, but not exclusively divine, but united to the person, flesh and form of a created being, and His whole inheritance merged in ours. He laid down His rights and honors, and took up our wrongs and reproaches, our liabilities, disabilities and responsibilities, and henceforth He has nothing but His people. He is the Merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, having found one pearl of great price, sold all that He had and bought that pearl. The Church, His Bride, is all He owns; He has invested everything in us. The Lord's portion is His people; therefore, let us make up to Him what He has laid down; let us understand His sacrifice and love, and let Him find in us His sufficient and everlasting recompense.

But the redeemer not only sacrificed his own inheritance, but also brought back the forfeited inheritance of the dead husband; and so our precious Goel has brought back for us all that we lost in Adam, and added to it infinitely more—all the fulness of His grace, all the riches of His glory, all that the ages to come are

yet to unfold in His mighty plan, victory over death, the restoration of the divine image, sonship with God, triumph over Satan, a world restored to more than Eden blessedness and beauty, the crowns and thrones of the coming kingdom, and all the exceeding riches of His grace and kindness toward us which in the ages to come He is to show. All this and more is the purchase of His redemption,

“In whom the tribes of Adam boast
More blessings than their father lost.”

But the best of all the blessings brought by the Kinsman Redeemer is Himself. Not only does He redeem the inheritance, but He purchases the bride and He becomes her Bridegroom. When Boaz bought the inheritance of Elimelech he took Ruth also in and she became his bride. And so our blessed Kinsman Redeemer is also our Husband. Not only does He come down into our nature in the incarnation, but He takes us up into His person in that wondrous betrothal which is to reach its consummation in the Marriage of the Lamb.

THE COURAGE OF FAITH.

Once more we see in Ruth's example the pattern of a faith that dares to claim and enter into all the possibilities of its inheritance. It needed on the part of Ruth a very bold and decided act to claim her rights under the Levirate law. They would not have come to her as the snowflakes fall, but they had to be recognized and definitely claimed. And so her mother told her all about it, and showed her that she was doing no unwomanly or immodest thing to put herself at the feet of Boaz and in the place to which she was entitled and leave upon him the responsibility of accepting or refusing her. Still it cost her many a struggle and many a tear before she robed herself in her wedding garments and, stealing through the eventide, lay down at the threshing floor of Boaz, putting herself and all that was dear to a woman's honor at his mercy. It was the abandonment of faith, but faith must always abandon itself before it can claim its blessing. It was thus that Mary, in later days, consented to risk her very reputation at the angel's message and believed for the mighty blessing that was to bring the

world its Redeemer at the cost for a time of even Mary's reputation. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," she cried, "be it unto me according to Thy word," and the answer came, "Blessed is she that believed, for there shall be an accomplishment of the things that were told her from the Lord." And so faith must ever claim its promised rights. Every victory costs a venture and the blessing is in proportion to the cost. Faith must still see its inheritance under the promise and then step boldly forward and take what God has given. Salvation is not now bestowed as mercy to a pauper, but is claimed in Jesus' name by a trusting child who inherits under his Brother's will. So we take His forgiveness and so we must take every blessing and answer to our prayer all along the way. God has given us the right to take this place of boldness. We are not presuming, but we are honoring His word. We are not entering beyond our rights, but we are showing our confidence in our Father's truth and love by daring to take all He has dared to give. So let us have "boldness

to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus ”

“And to its utmost fulness prove
The power of Jesus’ name.”

THE RECOMPENSE OF FAITH.

Finally, the fruit of the union was the dynasty of David and the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of man, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Ruth’s faith brought her into a family of princes and a kingdom of glory. And so for us, too, redemption means a crown and a throne at the Master’s glorious coming. But back of the throne and the crown lies the love story of redemption and the bold appropriation of faith. We must learn to know the Bridegroom now if we would sit with Him upon His throne then and share the glory of His millennial reign. Oh! shall we take Him as our Redeemer, our Husband, and our coming Lord, and have Him say to us, “Thy Maker is thy Husband and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel, the God of the whole earth shall He be called”?

CHAPTER XI.

SAMUEL, THE GREAT REFORMER

"Speak Lord, for Thy servant heareth" (I. Sam. iii. 9).

"And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground" (I. Sam. iii. 19).

THE life of Samuel marks a transition period in the history of Israel from the time of the judges to the kingdom of Saul and David. His was an epoch life like Abraham's, Joshua's and Luther's.

THE GREAT REFORMER.

He stands out the great Reformer of his time, lifting his people out of the Dark Ages of the Old Testament and leading them into the Golden Age of David's kingdom and Israel's preeminence among the nations. More than any other character of the ages he resembled Martin Luther, the great Reformer of the Christian Dispensation, who lifted the Church of God out of the corruption of bondage and superstition and gave us the Reformation, the Bible, the doctrines of grace and the light and liberty of Protestantism.

THE FOUNDER OF THE PROPHETICAL ORDER.

Samuel also enjoyed the distinguished honor of being the founder of the school of the prophets and the first in that glorious succession of holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and who formed the unbroken line of truth and righteousness in the history of God's ancient people. There were three representative official classes in the Old Testament—prophets, priests and kings. Among the priests were many honored names, as Aaron, Phinehas and Ezekiel, but the priesthood often became corrupt and allowed the very sanctuary of God to be defiled by the abominations of heathenism. The kings were also nobly represented by such names as David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah, but how often, alas! they were disgraced by men like Saul, Ahaz, Manasseh and Jehoiakim. But the prophets formed an unbroken line of faithful witnesses and glorious examples who, amid all the declensions of the nation and the apostasies of their priests and kings, not only stood true in their testimony to the will of God, but lived out in their lives the principles

of integrity and uprightness. From the days of Samuel they formed a distinct class and had a regular school of training, corresponding somewhat to our theological seminaries and training institutes, and Samuel had the pre-eminence of being the founder of these prophetic schools. Later in his life he went about the country as a pastor and overseer, visiting the towns and villages, holding conventions from place to place and instructing the people in the law of God and the schools of the prophets in the principles of the kingdom.

A SPOTLESS LIFE.

But, above all his public ministries and even his national influence, Samuel was himself a beautiful and spotless character. In an age of almost universal corruption he lived a life of blameless piety, and at a later period, when bidding farewell to the nation as their judge, he could truly call upon them to witness to his uprightness and integrity. "Behold," he said, "I am old and gray-headed, and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. Behold, here I am; witness against me before the Lord and before His

anointed. Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it to you. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken aught of any man's hand."

Samuel stands with Joseph, Joshua and Daniel, one of the blameless lives of sacred history; human no doubt in his infirmities, but no fault has been recorded against him and his personal character is the most eloquent testimony of all his history.

HIS MOTHER.

But we are permitted to trace this beautiful life to its source. Some characters, like Elijah's, suddenly burst upon our vision and we know them only in the public and closing chapters of their history. Some, however, are like a beautiful river that you can trace to its crystal fountain and follow through all its winding channels until, like our own Mississippi, it pours its volume into the sea and flows long after as a Gulf Stream through the mighty

ocean. We are permitted to stand by Samuel's cradle and even to know something of his prophetic future before his very birth. We enter into the joys and sorrows and the believing prayers of the holy mother, who was the real fountain, not only of his natural life, but, also, of his piety and holy power. And we walk side by side with him through his childhood and his youth until, at last, we meet him in the busy activities of his manhood and follow him until he lays down his ministry and passes to his honored rest.

HIS TIMES.

We do not need to go farther than his own family to understand the social condition of the age. Samuel's own mother, poor Hannah, was the victim of the curse of polygamy—ever a sign of a low condition of social morality. Then, when we turn to the priesthood, as illustrated in the family of Eli, we see a shocking exhibition of low sensuality, licentiousness and cupidity that would disgrace even the grossest heathenism. Eli himself, while a just and holy man in his own private character, was weak and inefficient as a judge and priest

and utterly failed to restrain his ungodly family or exercise any just administration of public affairs. The whole nation was, therefore, in a most pitiable condition, at the mercy of its foreign oppressors and so enfeebled that at a period a few years later we find that there was not a sword in Israel, and they had even to go to the grindstones of the Philistines in order to grind their plow coulters for the ordinary operations of husbandry. It was at such a time as this that God called Samuel to be the deliverer of his country.

We need never say that the adverse circumstances of our life forbid the possibility of living to purpose and living for God. The blacker the cloud the brighter may be the rainbow. The harder our situation the more can our life become a protest against it. The lighthouse needs the midnight darkness and the storm-beaten shore to bring out its value and its purpose; and there is no situation so trying and difficult but God can sustain us in it, and when we have learned our lesson, enable us to triumph over it. We, too, like Samuel, are called to live in degenerate times. We are approach-

ing the closing age of the dispensation, and the apostasy and tribulation which are to precede the coming of the Lord. It is not for us to excuse ourselves by prevailing wickedness, but to make our lives a protest against it and to shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of truth in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, a savour of life unto life if possible, but, if not, at least a savour of death unto death.

HIS BIRTH.

He was the child of faith and prayer, and his very name means "asked of God."

God loves to have every glorious thing born of some one's faith. Moses could not come until there was a Jochebed to believe for his deliverance and then to train him for the marvelous events of his history. Before even the Son of God could appear Mary of Bethlehem had to be taught by the Holy Ghost to believe for His birth and to lay down her womanly pride in the most costly sacrifice she could have been called to make at her Lord's command. And so Samuel is but the outcome of Hannah's piety, consecration and faith.

Back of that faith there lies a broken heart, a woman's tears, a life of bitterness, disappointment and humiliation. Poor Hannah was the second wife in a polygamous system whose fruit must ever be jealousy and sorrow. But out of her crushed heart came at last the believing prayer that brought her victory and consolation. All other sources of comfort had failed her, and at last she went to God, and at the tabernacle in Shiloh she poured out her prayer in sobs and tears until old Eli, the priest, thought her drunk and reproved her for her conduct. But she told him her story, and he sent her away with blessing and encouragement, and God whispered to her heart that her prayer was granted and her days of mourning ended.

And she did not forget when the blessing came that it was not hers, but God's, and lovingly and faithfully she gave it back to Him from whom it came. As soon as her little son was able to be left without a mother's watchful care she took him to the tabernacle, and gave him to Eli to be brought up as a child of the sanctuary. "I have lent him to the Lord,"

she said, "and as long as he lives he shall be lent unto the Lord." Not for a few days or weeks did she give him up, but she gave him wholly and with a sacrifice that only a mother could understand; she consented that the little feet for whose pattering she had longed should be heard no more in her cottage, that the prattle for whose music her lonely heart had waited a lifetime should sound no more in her ears, but that she should live on till the end alone, glad to know that he was all the Lord's and she was giving back to God the blessing which He had brought to her. This is love and this is the difference between the love of earth and the love of heaven. Earthly love loves for the pleasure it can find in loving. Heavenly love loves for the blessing it can give to the loved one. Hannah knew that her sacrifice was best for Samuel, and that in giving him to God she was getting more for him than a mother's selfish fondness could ever have bestowed.

And yet there was still the sweet thought behind it all that he was hers. She was not losing him but lending him, and God counted

her sacrifice a real service and some day would restore the loan with infinite and eternal additions. Oh! that every father and mother could understand the privilege of giving their child to God and getting him back some day with God's compound interest. You will give your daughter to a worthless man, but how slow you are to give her to Him who gave His life for you.

SAMUEL'S CHILDHOOD.

There are some lives whose glory it is to have been saved from the depths of sin. But there is even a higher beauty in having been so fully saved that our very childhood has been kept from the blight of corruption and depravity. This was Samuel's high privilege. He was always a holy child. He never knew the defiling breath of wickedness. This may be the privilege of your child, Christian mother. God help you to protect your innocent babe from the foul breath of sin's contamination and always to shelter that trusting life under the protecting wings of God. This may be your privilege, happy Christian child, who,

perchance, are reading these lines today. Oh, let God have your earliest years, and may you never know the mystery of iniquity and the memories of sin and shame which, though they may be forgiven, yet come back to defile and distress the heart.

DIVINE GRACE.

But Samuel was not holy and good by natural birth or disposition. He was not called because he was good by natural temperament, but he was saved and sanctified as we and our children still must be. It was only by the grace of God. Samuel, like every child of Adam, had to be born from above and receive the divine touch and the divine grace, and be brought into fellowship with the same supernatural power that saves us all.

We have the story of Samuel's first touch of God and it gives us the keynote not only of his life, but of every holy and heavenly life. The whole story is told in a single word—Samuel became acquainted with God. God revealed Himself to Samuel and Samuel heark-

ened, listened, and henceforth, forever, always implicitly obeyed.

HEARKENED.

The keynote of Samuel's life and of every saintly life is, "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." Samuel's task was not a hard one, and yet how rarely it is repeated. He had simply to attend to God, and say and do just what He told him.

This is the difference between the earthly and the heavenly life. The one is merely human, the other is divine. The crisis moment comes in every life when God speaks to us, and we hearken to Him and begin to walk in His holy fellowship and His perfect will. The very peculiarities of Samuel's call linger in his later life in his messages to Saul, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." All his blessings had come to him by hearkening and obeying, and all Saul's calamities had come to him because he wilfully took his own way and refused to listen to God.

At first even he made some mistakes and misunderstood the voice that spoke to him so

gently in his little chamber. Three times it called to him in vain, and he thought it was the old priest's message; but even when he understood not he still responded and sprang to his feet, ready instantly to obey. And so God will give us time to understand His voice and learn His will. What He asks of us is the obedient spirit, and the readiness to hear and understand. He will call again and yet again if necessary, and teach us to know all that He would have us to do. Let us listen so attentively and respond so quickly that we shall not need the stroke of His hand or the bit or bridle of His discipline to make us comprehend His will, but He can guide us with His eye and flash into our inmost being the instinctive intuition of His holy will. Oh! the sweetness and the rest, oh! the safety and the strength of the life that walks with God in this inner fellowship and knows no will but His.

OBEDIENT.

But Samuel had to obey as well as hearken, and it was no easy task to go to Eli and tell him all that God had spoken against his house. It was the hard test which often came

again in his later ministry as the messenger of God to sinful men. Again and again did he have to go to those he loved and say to them the thing which nearly broke his heart. A faithful ministry cannot always say smooth things. Often must we speak the words of God where we know that they will wither and break and perhaps alienate the dearest friendships of our lives. But Samuel obeyed so perfectly this time that he never was tempted to disobey again, and he learned the lesson well, which in later years was so often repeated in the history of Israel and the story of Saul.

HIS LIFE AND WORK.

We have a picture of Samuel's life and work. Henceforth, "the Lord was with Samuel," we are told, "and did let none of his words fall to the ground, and all Israel knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord."

What a picture of a successful life, where every word counts and the Lord lets nothing fail or have to be undone or taken back. How many of our words fall to the ground! How vain our efforts and our prayers and how oft

we have to traverse over again the paths of vanity!

How can we have an established life whose every step is fixed in God and led in the way everlasting? Only by doing as Samuel did, ever hearkening to God and speaking and acting only and always in Him. Then we shall not need to advertise ourselves. Men will find us out. Sad and empty lives will come to us for help and our work will be its own witness that God is with us. God help us to live such lives!

OUR EPOCH AGE.

We, too, are in an epoch age. God help us to be epoch men—men for the times on which the end of the age has come. Samuel was called to act in the beginning of the Hebrew history. We are permitted to see the close of our dispensation. Never before did the world so need the highest types of men and the noblest, truest kinds of ministry—lives that understand God, souls that hearken, ears sensitive to His lightest whisper and wills of adamant to obey implicitly His every word. These are the men that God is looking for to

mould the history of the world's last generation, and to usher in the kingdom of David's greater Son, as much as He needed a Samuel in the darkest days of Old Testament history and for the inauguration of David's reign.

CHAPTER XII.

THE REFORMATION UNDER SAMUEL

"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel saying, if ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ash-taroath from among you and prepare your hearts unto the Lord and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines" (I. Sam. vii. 3).

WE have looked at the great Reformer, let us now look at the Reformation.

FAILURE.

It began in the complete failure of the people themselves and the demonstration of their utter inability to lift themselves out of their helpless condition. God has to let us come to the end of ourselves before He can interpose for our deliverance. A mother stood on the deck of a ship, hardly restrained from throwing herself into the sea to save her drowning boy, while men stood by and waited as he sank again and again. At last, as he rose for the third time, a brave seaman leaped in and caught the sinking lad and held him

safely while both were drawn to the deck. "Why didn't you save him sooner?" cried the frantic mother, as her boy slowly came back to consciousness. "Because," said the sailor, "I had to wait until his strength was gone, or he would have drowned both himself and me." And so God has to wait until our strength is gone before He can save or sanctify or heal us.

This was Israel's state when Samuel came to the front as the leader of the new reformation. Politically, the country was under the power of the Philistine. Morally and socially the people were corrupt, and the fearful example of Hophni and Phinehas, the very priests of God who turned the sanctuary at Shiloh and the very services of Jehovah's worship into an orgy of license, could not fail to have a fatal influence upon the manners and the morals of all the people. Even Eli himself, who was still recognized as the ecclesiastical and judicial head of the nation, while honest and sincere in his purpose, was a helpless tool in the hands of his family. And so the very fountains of justice and religion were

utterly corrupted and all that was lacking was the crisis hour when this system of iniquity should fall to pieces by its own weight, as it really did at last. The critical moment came when the Philistines once more invaded the land, and in a moment of presumptuous despair the desperate leaders of Israel's forlorn hope brought out the ark of Jehovah. The Philistines realized at once their danger and their opportunity. They were fighting now not only Israel, but Israel's God, and so with redoubled valor the captains roused the host to do their best, and by one victorious blow not only to crush their enemies but secure for themselves the supernatural secret of their victorious power.

ELI'S DEATH.

As old Eli sat by the tabernacle court at Shiloh that eventide a cloud of dust appeared upon the distant horizon, and a swift runner rapidly dashed along until he stood breathless before the aged judge. As he rushed along, the people had already caught from his manner and his looks the fearful tidings, and a great cry arose throughout the city. Eli heard

the tumult and called the messenger to his side. The aged patriarch of ninety-eight was too blind to see his form, and could but dimly hear his words; but he eagerly asked him for tidings from the field, and as those fearful words fell upon his ear, "Israel is fled, there is a great slaughter among the people, thy two sons—Hophni and Phinehas—are dead, and the ark of God is taken," that last word broke the old man's heart, and he sank back in a swoon and fell heavily to the ground, and as they picked him up his neck was broken and his life was gone. Among the tragedies of that terrible day was the dying anguish of the wife of Phinehas and the significant name she left with her parting sigh of agony to the poor little orphan child which came that moment into life as the memorial of his country's shame, Ichabod, "the glory is departed." Yes, it was the deepest, darkest hour of the nation's woe, but it was the darkness just before the dawn and deliverance was near.

REVELATION OF GOD.

The next stage in the preparation of the coming Reformation was the revelation and

vindication of God as Himself the nation's Hope. The one great design of Israel's history as a nation was to be the witness and the revealer of God, and all the supernatural manifestations of their glorious past were intended not to show the greatness of their leaders, but the glory and all-sufficiency of their divine Lord and Leader. Sometimes, therefore, God had to let the human instruments utterly fail that He Himself might be the more gloriously vindicated in His own all-sufficiency and power.

And so we find in the later history of the nation that there came a time when the kings and the prophets and priests of Judah and Israel completely failed to glorify Jehovah among the nations or accomplish His purpose for the world, and yet this became the most illustrious day of His own manifestation. He had to let the very kingdom of Judah and Israel pass away in ignominious defeat, and even the temple itself become a heap of smouldering ashes before the victorious power of Nebuchadnezzar; and yet, in that very hour, He called four humble Hebrew youths in

Babylon to stand for Him in the furnace of fire and the lion's den, and so to vindicate His own glory and supremacy that in the hour of his pride Nebuchadnezzar, the mightiest king and conqueror of the earth, was compelled to acknowledge that Jehovah was the only true God, and to issue a decree calling upon his subjects to worship the God of Daniel as the true God and the Sovereign Ruler of the Universe. And a little later he compelled Cyrus, Artaxerxes and even Xerxes, the proud despots of Persia, to recognize His supremacy, to protect His people and even to send back the captives from Babylon to rebuild the city and the temple at Jerusalem.

GOD VINDICATED.

And so here we find in this period of Israel's history that while the nation failed and the priesthood failed and the very ark of God seemed to fail, God Himself became the more gloriously vindicated even in the midst of His enemies. No sooner had the ark of God been taken by the Philistines than a long train of desolation followed in its path wherever it went. They set it up in the temple of Dagon

among their gods, and in the morning Dagon was fallen on his face before the ark of God. They set him up again, and the next morning he was not only fallen down, but shattered to pieces before the awful presence of the God of the ark. The most humiliating and distressing plagues began to fall upon the people and they begged that it should be sent away from Ashdod, but no sooner had they taken it to Gath than there they begged that it be removed. And so they took it to Ekron, but the people of Ekron protested, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us to slay us and our people." And so at last they called a council and determined to send it back to Israel once more. So, preparing a costly present and choosing two milch kine, they put it on a cart and committed it to the God whom it represented in some superstitious way to their terrified minds. But it needed no human hand to guide that holy symbol of Jehovah's presence. Contrary to their own instincts, those Hebrew kine went steadily forward at a divine command which they could neither understand nor disobey, lowing as they

went, because their hearts carried them backwards to their calves; yet on they went at the bidding of a power that drove them in the opposite direction until they reached Bethshemesh, where the Levites met the sacred ark and took the cattle that bore it and offered them up in sacrifice unto the Lord and presented the costly offerings before the Lord. Thus God showed that He could vindicate His own glory and lead His own way without the help or wisdom of man.

And even a more solemn lesson still had to be learned, for as the men of Bethshemesh presumed to approach the holy symbol of the presence of God with forbidden familiarity they were smitten with death and, as nearly as we can understand from the doubtful readings of the passage (I. Sam. vi. 19), seventy men (not fifty thousand, as the Revised Version states) perished for their presumption.

This is the lesson that we all need to learn before we are prepared to truly represent God, that God does not need us or our strength, but that we need to understand Him and know that He is all-sufficient for His own work, and that

what He requires of us is that we know Him, bear witness to Him and truly represent Him. He is able to take care of His own cause if we only give Him right of way. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

The best way to glorify God is to hold Him up to men and He will glorify Himself. As we go forth to meet the tests and conflicts of these last days we need to understand our God, and to know that One is in our midst and on our side who, standing between heaven and earth, has already said, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth, and, lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age." We have plenty of people to-day who know the culture and wisdom of the ages and even the theology of the Bible, but what we want are people that know their God and can stand alone and trust Him in the hour of trial, in the face of difficulties, in the midst of enemies, in the lands of the heathen and in situations where there is no hope or help but God and God alone.

REPENTANCE.

The next step in Israel's Reformation

was national repentance and the turning of the people with their whole heart from all idolatry and sin unto the Lord. And so Samuel calls them together at Mizpah to a great day of national humiliation, and addresses to them the language of our text, which is the watchword of every true reformation and revival. The essential condition of God's acceptance and blessing always must be deep sincerity; penitence and absolute rightness with God. No matter how long or how far you may have wandered, no matter how great your sin, or how deep your sinfulness, the honest, earnest heart will always and instantly find the heart of God. If you have not found Him it is because there is some reservation, some insincerity, some idol to which you cling, some disingenuousness of heart or cherished crookedness of life. God has fixed the instant when every soul will find Him, and that is "when ye search for Me with all your heart."

And so they came together, not only with fasting and with the symbolical pouring out of the waters of cleansing before the Lord, but the best of all is that "Samuel judged the

children of Israel in Mizpah." It is this judging of ourselves that puts us right with God. It is not emotional feeling nor fountains of tears; but simply calling things by their right names and putting them in their true places. Therefore the promise is, "If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." He does not say anything about great sorrow or deep feeling, but simple straightforward confessing. What He wants is to have us see things aright, diagnose the disease, recognize the fault, and then we shall be saved from future deception and disobedience. This is the emphatic meaning of that remarkable passage in I. Corinthians xi. 31: "If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged." That is, if we would discern ourselves and put everything in its right place in our lives we should not need God's heavier blow to wake us out of our deceptions and hold us back from evil.

THE BLOOD.

The next stage in Israel's Reformation was the precious atoning blood. How beauti-

fully that sacrificial scene is described: "And Samuel took a sucking lamb and offered it as burnt offering wholly unto the Lord. And Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel and the Lord heard him." This was the difference between the present reformation and many of those that had gone before. There was at this time a thorough recognition of the atoning blood. Without this there can be no radical and lasting change in the life of an individual or people. The disposition to ignore the sacrificial meaning of Christ's death and to reduce His vicarious offering to a mere object lesson is the most alarming condition of our Christian life and the real secret of the declension of practical righteousness and holiness.

The deepest meaning of the blood, too, many of us fail to understand. It means not cleansing, but crucifixion; not blotting out, but burying. It is not merely that the blood wipes out the sin, but it wipes out the sinner, too. The real significance of the death of Christ is that the man who committed the sin is judged, condemned and crucified with Christ, that he is not the same man that lives now, that he has

been repudiated and forever put aside, and that a new man, born of Christ and descending out of heaven, has come in His place so truly that we can say in the literal language of the great Apostle, "I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

This is the reason men hate the cross, because it is not only Christ's cross, but it is bound to be their cross, too. It means not only a dead Saviour, but a dead sinner. But this is the only way that the sin can ever cease and the cleansing ever be permanent and complete.

THE ENEMY.

Next comes the test of faith and the attack of the foe. Just as the deliverance is about to come, the enemy musters in double force, and all Israel's fears seem about to be realized. How emphatic is the time of this attack. "As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel," and the trembling people stood unarmed, de-

fenceless and dismayed. "Cease not," they cried to Samuel, "to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines." And as that smoking sacrifice ascended silently to the heavens, hark! along the sky there burst the artillery of heaven, and a terrific thunder storm poured down upon the embattled foe, doubtless with quivering lightning stroke and mighty hail-stones, as in the day of Gideon's battle, and the enemy fled in confusion, pursued by their triumphant foes until they were scattered and dispersed. So signal was the victory that we are told in the next verse "they came no more into the coast of Israel, and the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel, and the cities which the Philistines took were restored unto Israel from Ekron even unto Gath, and the coast thereof did Israel deliver out of the hands of the Philistines." The victory was complete and permanent, and the Reformation had become a Restoration.

EBENEZER.

The last chapter was a doxology of praise.

"Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." This is ever the consummation of penitence and believing prayer. The sorrow is turned into joy and the prayer is translated into praise. This is the true way to show that we really do believe God. Not until we cease our pleading and begin to thank Him that the blessing is given shall we really have cause for thanksgiving. In the City of Salvation all the gates are Praise, and the reason many fail to enter in is because they try to creep through the tunnels rather than enter through the open gates of thankfulness and praise. This is the secret of victory forevermore, to take what He gives and thank Him for it in advance.

This is also the secret of defeat and failure, a spirit of gloom, depression, moroseness and murmuring. The moment you begin to grumble God will give you something to grumble for, and the moment you begin to praise He will give you cause for love and praise. The dreary pathway that missed the Land of Prom-

ise and for forty years trod the lonely desert all began in the murmuring at Taberah (Num. xi. 1), and, on the other hand, the glorious Renaissance which led through Samuel's reformation to David's throne and Solomon's glory, all began in the stone of Ebenezer, and the praise of a trustful, thankful people. Let us, beloved, set up today over against every place of failure, over against every sorrow, yea, over against every sin as we cover it with the cleansing blood, not a banner merely, nor even a song, but a stone of Ebenezer, and write upon it, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

CHAPTER XIII.

SAUL, OR SELF-LIFE LEADING TO DESTRUCTION

THE place of Saul in Old Testament history is significant, and we believe, typical of great spiritual truths. It is conceded that Israel's redemption from Egypt foreshadowed human redemption through the cross of Calvary. It is beyond question that the triumph of Joshua and the conquest of Canaan pointed forward to the Pentecostal baptism and blessing of the Apostolic Church and the deeper rest into which the Holy Ghost brings the individual Christian.

We have already seen that the dark period of declension recorded in the Book of Judges and the earlier chapters of Samuel was typical of the dark ages of Christianity, and we have just seen that the Reformation under Samuel was strongly parallel to our Protestant Reformation and the revival of the Church of

Christ from the bondage of mediæval darkness and superstition. A little farther on we shall find that the kingdom of David and Solomon was the type of Christ's Millennial throne.

THE COUNTERFEIT KING.

But what was the meaning of the strange parenthesis of Saul's life that came before the kingdom of David and Solomon? Alas! it is the counterfeit kingdom which Satan is seeking to set up on the throne of human selfishness and worldly pride, instead of the true kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of which, alas! we have too many evidences in the compromising and worldly ecclesiasticism of our day, and in the Laodicean picture which the Apocalypse has given of the Church that is to be rejected at the coming of the Lord.

But while this is the dispensational meaning of Saul's life, it has a still more solemn personal application for every individual Christian. It is God's fearful object lesson of the power and the peril of the self-life and the need of its utter crucifixion before we can enter into the true kingdom of spiritual victory and power

THEIR MOTIVES.

We see the spirit of self in the very motive that prompted the kingdom of Saul. Samuel perfectly understood it as a virtual rejection of God as the supreme King of Israel and a real vainglorious desire to be independent of divine control and to be like the surrounding nations of the world. "Make us a king," they said, "to judge us like all the nations." No wonder that Samuel was deeply displeased and prayed unto the Lord. But God answered him: "Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they have said unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."

Nevertheless, Samuel still protested and solemnly warned them of the burdens and the exactions which their king would claim from them and the trouble they were bringing upon themselves, adding: "Ye shall cry out on that day because of your king, which ye have chosen, and the Lord will not hear you in that day." But it was no use. They had set their heart upon their king and they answered: "We will have a king over us, that we may also be like

all the nations ; and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles." This is the spirit of the prodigal, saying, "Father, give me the portion of goods that fall-eth to me." It is the desire of independence which is the very root of human sin, and it is the spirit of conformity to the world in the Church today, and we are conscious of it in our own natural hearts as that big, self-asserting and dominant "I" which makes a man a god unto himself and refuses to surrender his will to Christ, or yield the direction of his life to the will of God and the government of the Holy Ghost.

Therefore, the very first step in the new life must ever be surrender ; and the essential condition of the baptism of the Holy Ghost is to yield the very last point to God, and even the things which may in themselves be harmless must be first surrendered if for no other reason than to prove that our will is wholly laid down and that God is all in all.

SAUL, THE FLESHLY MAN.

We see the spirit of self in the very character of Saul, and the qualifications which made

him the choice and the idol of the people. Saul was the very embodiment of the human. He represented all that was most strong, chivalrous, attractive and promising in human nature. He was of splendid physique, a head taller than all the people, a magnificent specimen of physical manhood, and "every inch a king."

He possessed the intellectual, moral and social qualities that constitute a great public leader. He was brave, heroic, enthusiastic and generous, and the early years of his reign are adorned with some stirring examples of heroic deeds. He was all that the human heart would choose. He represented the best possibilities of human nature, and as the people looked at his splendid figure they shouted again and again that patriotic cry which has so often re-echoed since, and which has so seldom been fulfilled as a prayer to heaven, "God save the king!"

God had to let this man stand before the ages to show that man at his best is only man and that human self-sufficiency must end in failure and desperate sorrow. This is the les-

son that God is trying to teach His children still. How few of them have found it out so fully that they can say, "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." The sentence of death has passed upon the flesh, and there is but one thing we can do with it—to nail it to the cross of Jesus Christ, to reckon it dead, and to keep it forever in His bottomless grave.

MUCH THAT WAS GOOD.

The spirit of self in Saul was combined with much that was good and attractive, both naturally and spiritually. Naturally, we have seen that he was not only a man of princely bearing, but of many noble and heroic qualities. He had also a most beautiful family, and Jonathan, his son, is the most attractive figure in the long gallery of Bible characters.

When Saul came to Samuel and first was called to the kingdom, he seemed to have many elements of sterling virtue and genuine humility. Like a dutiful son, he went to search for his father's asses, and then he went to the prophet Samuel to ask counsel about finding them. When he came to Samuel and

was told his extraordinary message and anointed to be king, there was no unbecoming self-consciousness about him. He kept his secret with discretion and modesty, and even in telling his uncle about the words of Samuel he said nothing to him about the greater message concerning the kingdom. When he left the presence of Samuel he did just as he was told, and when he met the company of prophets he joined them and received a real baptism of the Spirit like them and prophesied among them with genuine religious enthusiasm. And even when they sought for him to bring him out before the people and announce to him his choice as the national ruler, they could not find him, for he was hiding among the stuff and he seemed a very paragon of modesty and unobtrusiveness. And yet this was the very man who let the dark and dreadful shadow of himself blight his own life and ruin his kingdom and his family. Oh, how self-deceptive is the human spirit! Oh, how pride itself will hide away in the very guise of deepest humility! In speaking of his earlier life the prophet Samuel pays a tribute to his form-

er humility. "When thou wast little in thine own sight," he says, "wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?" We cannot doubt that Samuel's language is perfectly sincere, and that he is giving Saul credit for at least a measure of genuine humility. What then was the defect? May it have been this? It is one thing to be little in our eyes, it is another thing to be out of our own sight altogether. True humility is not thinking meanly of ourselves, it is not thinking of ourselves at all. What we need is not so much self-denial as self-crucifixion and utter self-forgetfulness. The perfect child is just as unconscious in the highest place as in the lowest, and the true Spirit of Christ in us recognizes ourselves as no longer ourselves, but so one with the Lord Jesus that we can truly say: "Not I, but Christ who liveth in me." "By the grace of God I am what I am."

But what are we to learn from this combination of so many excellencies in one life and its ultimate failure and ruin? Alas, we are to learn that Satan's choicest wile is to mingle

the good with the evil and to cover his poison as a sugar-coated pill, because he knows we would never take it in its unmixed and undiluted evil. Satan's choicest agents are those that are attractive and naturally lovely. Esau was a more winning man naturally than Jacob; but Esau was lost and Jacob was chosen. You may be beautiful, you may be wise, you may be cultured, you may be moral, you may be useful, you may be noble and generous, and yet, withal, you may be living for yourself and, at last, like Saul, self-destroyed. Satan only wants a mortgage on you, and he is content to take a mortgage for a thousand dollars if he cannot get one for a hundred thousand. He can wait for the day of foreclosure. All he wants is to have his hand in it. It is the mixed lives that are doing the mischief.

"Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord God Almighty."

HIS FIRST TEST.

The first test came to Saul in an hour of se-

vere trial when, beleaguered by his enemies and deserted by almost all his soldiers, he seemed to be facing destruction. Waiting seven days for Samuel to come and begin the battle by the usual sacrificial offering, Saul at last grew discouraged and impatient, and then he presumed to take upon himself the priestly functions which belonged only to Samuel, and to offer up the sacrifice without waiting for the prophet. As he was offering it, Samuel came and instantly pronounced upon Saul the terrible sentence: "Thou hast done foolishly; thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, as He commanded thee; for now would the Lord thy God have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever, but now shall thy kingdom not continue. The Lord hath sought Him a man after His own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over His people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee."

Many a life succeeds while all is successful, but in the hour of trial self always shows itself. Saul was a splendid king until the first great trial met him, and then he became discour-

aged, distrustful, self-asserting and presumptuous, and dared to take in his own hands the things that belonged only to God. He usurped the throne of God Himself and showed his true nature. He was a man of his own heart and not of God's heart, and henceforth God sought Him a man after God's heart who should do God's will and not his own, and thus be a true representative of Israel's true King. As soon as Saul had shown himself in his real character, God immediately delivered the people out of their peril by two feeble men—Jonathan and his armor-bearer—that He might show to Saul how little He needed his strength or any human strength or wisdom, and how all-sufficient God was to those who only trusted Him. Even this victory Saul almost wrecked by his interference and wilfulness, and it became apparent by his own folly that he could not be trusted with God's work, and that his persistent self-will would always hinder the will and the work of God.

Not instantly did the crisis come. Slowly did God let this spirit of self work out into its full development; but it was evident from this hour

that Saul's life must fail, and that Samuel's prophecy was, alas, true.

THE SECOND TEST.

God gave another opportunity and a second test. He sent Saul on an important expedition to destroy Amalek, the race of Esau that had tried to hinder Israel in their passage through the wilderness. There is a deep spiritual meaning back of this story; for Amalek was a type of the flesh; and the destruction of Amalek was just an illustration of the very principle which Saul's life so strongly emphasizes, and Saul's failure to destroy Amalek is, therefore, the more significant because it shows how deeply rooted the self-principle was in his own soul. The man who spared Agag was the man who spared the principle of self in his own heart; and the two pictures blend with an awful significance for every one of us.

Saul successfully accomplished the invasion and returned victorious. He even seems to have been so possessed with the spirit of self-complacency that he failed to realize his own true character until Samuel uttered his fearful words of doom. "Yea, I have obeyed the com-

mandment," he cried with perfect assurance, and when the awful words of the prophet answered back: "Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams"—"Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He also hath rejected thee from being king," it is doubtful if even then Saul fully realized the nature of his sin; so subtle and self-deceiving is the spirit of self that even then all he seemed to feel was the fear of being humiliated before the people. And so he begged the petty bauble of Samuel's public recognition and honor, and this little bit of vainglory was the solace and the comfort of his wretched soul in the hour when the sentence of death and ruin was thundering in his ears. What a spectacle of self-complacency and self-deception! We see the snare of a religious motive, keeping the spoil to sacrifice to the Lord, and the fear of man, in the unwillingness of this weak man to displease the people when they begged him to save the precious booty of Amalek.

COMPROMISE.

But one word above all others seems to crys-

tallize the very element of this stupendous folly. It is the word "compromise." Saul obeyed, but with a compromise. Saul did much good, but he compromised with evil. God's commandments are uncompromising, inexorable, unqualified, and our obedience must be inflexible, absolute and complete. The faintest reservation is really the very soul of disobedience. The failure even to hearken to the full meaning of God indicates a spirit of unwilling obedience.

Saul stands before us in this picture the incarnation of self-will and, therefore, the enemy of God, nay, the rival of God upon His very throne. Could there be any other issue? "Thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord hath rejected thee from being king."

GOD'S PATIENCE.

Not immediately did the judgment culminate. Slowly still the coil of self unwinds until all its hidden sinuosities have been revealed. Saul did much work after this, much good work, fought many battles, fought them well, reigned over Israel, and established a powerful kingdom, but it was Saul's kingdom

and not God's. All the remaining years were years of self-activity and self-vindication. For nine years he pursued David, his rival, with ferocious hate. The Spirit of God left him, and an evil spirit, by God's permission, possessed him; and as the years went on, the beginning and the end of his existence was Saul and not Jehovah. It was self incarnate, with all its miserable works and fruits.

AT LAST.

At last the culmination came. Eaten out by the canker of self, his heart became the dwelling place of Satan. The devil took entire possession of him, and in one dreadful hour he gave himself up to spiritualism and, rejected of the Lord, sought the counsel of necromancers, whom he had formerly persecuted and banished from his kingdom. It was the last fatal step. Self had driven God from the throne, and now it gave it to Satan, and the next chapter of self-life was self-destruction.

Trembling and prostrated by the fearful vision which his own presumption had brought up from the depths of Hades, Saul dashed with reckless despair into the last battle of his life,

and the next day the tragedy was complete—the flower of Israel's youth was lying on the slopes of Gilboa—the army of Saul was annihilated—the Philistines were victorious on every side—the kingdom which Saul had built up for a quarter of a century for himself was broken to pieces and scattered to the winds—Saul's sons were lying dead on the mountain sides, and Saul himself, a wretched suicide, had gone to his own fearful place. The scorpion, self, had stung others, and now, at last, it stung itself to death. The revelation of human selfishness was complete, and before the sad and fearful spectacle we may well stand in awe, and humbly, earnestly and fervently pray:

Oh, to be saved from myself, dear Lord,
Oh, to be lost in Thee!
Oh, that it might be no more I,
But Christ that lives in me.

CHAPTER XIV.

JONATHAN, OR THE FRIEND THAT STICKETH CLOSER THAN A BROTHER

"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Prov. xviii. 24).

GOD has made the human heart to be an alphabet of higher things. The material world was made to be a type of the higher spiritual realm, and all the objects of nature are but living characters by which God has written His name upon His works. God has given us the filial heart that we might understand the love we ought to feel to our Father in heaven. He has made the love of father, mother and brother that we might in some measure realize God's divine paternity—the Holy Spirit's motherhood and the heart of that "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." The best of human friendships is but a bit of broken glass reflecting something higher in the heavens above us; and as in the little fragment of a shattered mirror you can

see the sun reflected from above, so in our poor, imperfect hearts and our broken earthly ties we have a revelation of the heart of God.

The story of Jonathan stands out in vivid relief against the dark background of his father's life, and is one of the finest examples of human character and holy friendship. Beautiful in itself and reflecting the highest nobility in the subject himself, it is a still higher object lesson of divine love, and unfolds, as no other sacred picture, the friendship of Christ, the "Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." There are several aspects in which we may look at this beautiful picture.

HEROIC FAITH.

It is an example of high character and heroic faith. True love must rest on a basis deeper and stronger than mere sentiment or passion. The pretty face, the charm of manner, the thousand little things which become like fetiches to attract the fancy or even the idolatry of the superficial and the selfish world, will soon be forgotten and instead of the rose will be the thorn of bitter disappointment and hopeless heartbreak. The only true founda-

tion of a lasting friendship is high and noble character. Love is the magnetic attraction of two kindred lives to each other, meeting like two drops of water because they are akin. Respect and esteem must ever lie back of affection, and the more intimately we know each other the more perfectly ought we to be able to respect each other's character or else our love must become one-sided and transient.

Jonathan and David were both lofty natures, who recognized in each other the nobility of highest manhood, and their souls were knit together by an esteem that was as perfect as their affection was intense. Jonathan well deserved the regard of his friend. He was a born hero and his heroism was not a romantic sentiment, but a deep and settled principle of faith in God.

One startling example shines out, and stands no doubt for many an unrecorded act behind. The Philistines had gathered in overwhelming force, and the little army of Saul was wearing away until only about six hundred remained around the royal standard. In the Philistine host there were six thousand cavalry, thirty

thousand chariots of iron and hundreds of thousands of infantry, a mighty and apparently irresistible foe.

Saul had waited for Samuel to come and inaugurate the campaign by the sacrificial rites, and then despairing of his arrival had rashly presumed to assume the priestly functions and offer the sacrifice himself. The result was the divine displeasure, the rebuke of Samuel and the withdrawal of divine favor.

It was the darkest hour that could possibly have come to the nation and the cause. But dark hours are always the hours when character reveals its sterling qualities. The stars shine out at night as they cannot in the day, and this was the hour when Jonathan's true character was made plain.

Accompanied by his solitary armor-bearer, he looked across the valley to the Philistines' stronghold in the clefts of the naked rocks, and he suggested to his armor-bearer that they should go up against them, "for," he added, in the language of true faith, "it may be that the Lord will work for us, for there is no restraint with the Lord to work by many or by few."

He was not looking at numbers, but at God. Happily, he had in his armor-bearer a kindred spirit. There were two heroes that day, and it is just as noble to help a noble nature and to stand out of sight but in full accord as it is to lead the van in some glorious advance. Noble natures find out noble natures, and it is a glorious thing to have on our side in the hour of trial and in the hour of lofty daring some kindred heart to say to us, "Do all that is in thine heart; behold I am with thee according to thine heart."

WISE LEADERSHIP.

But we see in Jonathan not only a daring adventurer, but also a wise and prudent leader who has learned not only to initiate a great movement but to carry it through in wise caution and unceasing dependence upon the strong arm of God. Many a movement is well begun but disastrously ended because we let human impulse take the place of humble faith, and holding the bit in our own teeth we dash ahead of God and sometimes are hurled headlong over the precipice of presumption.

Jonathan waited for God to make every step

plain, and so they agreed that God should give them a further sign whether they were to make the advance as proposed. The sign was that the Philistine garrison was to invite them up for a parley on that rocky height. That was all he wanted, and now bold impulse and humble dependence upon God were changed into instant and effectual action, and they quickly scaled the height and threw themselves upon their unsuspecting enemies until twenty had fallen at their feet.

Suddenly a panic seized the host, and God seconded the bold attack by a startling earthquake, which shook the ground, and a dreadful fear fell upon the foe, so that, thinking there was some mighty host behind them, they turned and fled, pressing one another down as they were swept away before the avalanche, until Saul's watchmen saw from the distant heights of Gibeah that host of myriad men in full retreat. Then Saul and his soldiers took up the pursuit and, once again, his presumption, folly and wilfulness almost ruined the victory that God had wrought, and, but for the intervention of the people, who rescued Jona-

than out of his hands, the noble hero, who had been the instrument of all the blessing of that day, would have been the victim of his father's wilfulness and haste. This illustration is sufficient to show us the background of strength in the character of Jonathan and the qualities which, had he lived and reigned, would have made him, doubtless, as illustrious as the friend for whose sake he gave up his opportunities and honors and even sacrificed his life at last.

Beloved, let it be your aim and mine, not so much to win the love of others as to be worthy of it; not so much to be esteemed as to be deserving of esteem; not so much to bind to ourselves the hearts of men as to stand so high and glorious that we shall draw them to us as the magnet draws the steel. It is better to be than to seem; and true character, like precious gems, cannot be always undiscovered, but will find its place and reach its full appreciation and glorious coronation.

And you who are setting your affections on all the capricious fancies of your mind and becoming attached to those you lightly meet,

oh, remember that you are weaving for yourselves a future of intolerable bondage and a shroud of agony and death. You are letting your hearts become bound by a spell that even you cannot break, to persons and things that will drag you down and make your life a disappointment if not a disaster. Remember that it is a sign of a noble character to love the noble. Do not link your lives with the unholy and the earthly, but let your associations be regulated by holy principle and your friendships fastened to the skies.

HOLY FRIENDSHIP.

We see the picture of a holy friendship. The attachment of David and Jonathan is spoken of in the highest terms. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." And in the pledge of his affection he made a covenant with his friend and stripped himself of his princely robe, and even of his personal and inner garments, bearing, no doubt, the monogram of his royal name, and even the very sword, which was to a warrior the badge of his highest honor, and his bow and his very

girdle, which was the most sacred article of personal apparel in an Oriental wardrobe, for it was his purse and the repository of all his secrets and sacred treasures—all these Jonathan gave to David as the expression of his unreserved oneness with the friend of his inmost heart.

Speaking of his affection afterwards, David uses in his exquisite dirge over his fallen friend this extreme and almost extravagant language, "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan, very pleasant hast thou been unto me, thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women." Perhaps there is no human affection so intense as a pure woman's whole-hearted love when she yields her whole being to the one she utterly trusts. But even this was surpassed by the noble and wonderful devotion of this lofty heart.

Well did Jonathan prove it. Not only did he give these pledges of his confidence to his friend in the first emotion of his early love, but he stood true to him through all the perils of the succeeding years. There is no higher

proof of love than loyalty to a friend in the midst of foes.

A noble nature cannot be disloyal. A double-faced friend is worse than an enemy. You may always distrust a traitor. The man that can receive the confidence and kindness of another and then go and speak against him or let others speak against him, is not only a false friend but a worthless character in every other relation of life.

You may safely distrust the man or woman that comes to you with evil tales of a former friend. Some day they will be the bearer of worse tales respecting you. Such people deserve to be rebuked wherever we find them, and taught the lesson of their ignominy and meanness.

Jonathan was no such friend. When he found his father's jealousy against David becoming dangerous he tried to check it, and for a while succeeded in overcoming it and bringing about a reconciliation. But as time wore on and that father's bitterness grew more malignant, and Jonathan knew that nothing would satisfy it but David's life, he even risked his

life to vindicate his friend. And, then, when he found it was hopeless to make a further attempt, he was true enough to sacrifice his own pleasure in David's companionship and warn him that he must flee. And so at last the two friends parted, probably to meet no more, parted with many an embrace and many a tear, but parted bravely and went their ways, the one to wait for his kingdom and the other to lay down his life and know that he was yielding his kingly prospects, his very crown, to the friend he loved.

It was to Jonathan's interest even more than Saul's that David should die, because his survival meant that he should succeed to the throne of Saul, and Jonathan knew this and, knowing it, accepted it, acquiesced in it, rejoiced in it, and gladly gave place to the one he loved, and at last laid down his very life, glad, perhaps, to know that the way was made clear for David's future throne.

UNSELFISH LOVE.

The deepest principle of true friendship and, indeed, the greatest thing in the universe, is unselfish love. Satan delights to pervert the

best things, and the way he perverts love is by inverting it and turning it into selfishness. The saddest thing in the world is that which ought to be the noblest but is the meanest, when even love itself becomes corrupted into its own opposite by terminating on itself. Whenever we love because of the pleasure it ministers to us we cease to love and it becomes self-love. True love always looks outward to its object and finds its pleasure in the pleasure it communicates and the blessing it gives. Love inverted and perverted becomes lust, which is the vilest blot and curse of human character and human history.

Beloved, would you know the secret of a holy friendship and a happy love? Learn to forget yourself, and live for others and to let your fondest affections and friendships minister blessing to those you love, and the reflex action, without your seeking it, will be your own highest happiness.

God is Love in this sublime sense. His constant occupation is to bless and, therefore, God is blessed, too, and His bosom is the source and the sum of all true joy.

THE HEAVENLY FRIEND.

Jonathan was a type of the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. The friendship of David and Jonathan leads us up to the higher love of the Lord Jesus Christ for us, and the divine friendship which He permits us to claim with Him. If Jonathan's love was wonderful, passing the love of women, Christ's love is more wonderful, surpassing all human friendship and transcending all examples and tests of love.

Jonathan's heart was knit unto David and he loved him as his own soul, but Christ is not only knit unto us, but He is one with us. He has partaken of our very nature, our blood flows through His veins and He has loved us better than His own soul, for He poured out His soul unto death and laid down His life without a reservation, because He loved us and gave Himself for us.

Jonathan gave David his outer robe, and even his inner garments, but Christ has given to us the robes of His glory and His kingly dignity, and the very raiment of His righteousness and His personal character and life.

Jonathan gave to David his sword, the very symbol of his power, and Christ has armed us with His own strength and given to us His own victory.

Jonathan gave David his bow as well as his sword, and Christ has not only armed us for the foes that are immediately around us, but He has given to us the weapons by which we can reach the very heights of heaven and the uttermost parts of the earth. By the bow of faith and the arrows of prayer we can reach the omnipotence of God and our influence can extend to the farthest reaches and the lowest depths of human sin and sorrow.

And Jonathan gave to David his girdle. In one sense the girdle binds all the raiment together, and might well represent the whole person and apparel. Christ gives us everything He has and is. The girdle was especially the symbol of strength for service. The girded soldier was ready for battle, the girded servant ready for work. Christ girds us with His own power and enables us for the service which He claims from us.

And if the girdle signifies the more sacred

treasures of the Oriental, containing his wallet, papers, money, jewels and the things he most prized, so Christ has given to us also the very treasures of His love and the very secrets of His confidence. He has held nothing back from us, but He takes us into His inmost heart and says to us, "Henceforth I call you not servants; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you."

Most touching of all, however, is the fact that Christ, like Jonathan, has died for us that we might inherit His very throne and enjoy the rich bequests of His will. He has given us the New Testament as His last will, bequeathing to us our glorious inheritance, and He has risen again to secure it to us from every adversary or failure.

Oh, what a wonderful place
Jesus has given to me!
Saved by His glorious grace,
I may be even as He.
All that He has shall be mine;
All that He is I shall be,
Robed in His glory divine
I shall be even as He.

CHAPTER XV.

AGAG, OR THE SUBTLETIES OF THE SELF-LIFE

“And Samuel said, Bring ye hither to me Agag, the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal” (I. Sam. xv. 32, 33).

WE have already referred to this passage as an illustration of the character of Saul. There is still a deeper type of the subtleties of the self-life in the picture of Agag which the Holy Ghost has framed into the narrative of this solemn history. Saul and Agag both teach the same great lesson and warning, namely, the peril of a self-centered life, but they teach it in somewhat different ways, and the story of Agag is worthy of our prayerful and heart-searching consideration.

AMALEK OR THE FLESH.

Agag belonged to the race of Amalek and the family of Esau, who represent through their entire genealogy the life of the flesh. From the very beginning of the human race God has drawn the line of demarcation between two races—the fleshly and the spiritual man. Just outside the gate of Eden the division began. The family of Seth “called themselves by the name of the Lord,” and the race of Cain went off and built their city of culture and pride and became the pioneers of the worldliness and wickedness refined and ameliorated by all the grace of human culture and all the attractions of earthly delight. The separation, alas! soon began to disappear, and in the days of Noah the two races had mingled and intermarried, and the progeny was a generation of monsters of iniquity so degenerate and depraved that God turned with loathing from the whole race and pronounced the awful sentence, “The end of all flesh is come before Me, I will destroy man from off the face of the earth.” After the flood God chose a separate family in the line of Abraham, and

again endeavored to keep the chosen people separate. All along that line we see the earthly offshoots of the family tree separating from the central trunk and going out into the world. The first of these was Ishmael, the type of the spirit of bondage and sin. The next of these was Esau, the progenitor of a whole race who inherited the earthly spirit of their father, who, for a morsel of meat, sold his birth-right and afterwards married with the daughters of Canaan and became as corrupt and polluted as they. In the same line were the descendants of Lot's unnatural daughters, the Moabites and the Ammonites. But above all these, the race of Esau and Amalek were the marked representatives of the spirit of the flesh and the world. This was the reason that God pronounced the decree of their extermination. We find that when Israel went out of Egypt and started on their journey through the wilderness on their way to the Land of Promise, Amalek was the first to attack them. It is not difficult to see in this the foreshadowing of the fact that the first adversary that we have to contend with when we leave our sinful

past of bondage and iniquity is the carnal nature in our own hearts, which soon asserts itself and tries to force us back to "the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." This is what Agag represents and this is what each of us has found to our cost to be a very real element in the experience of a Christian life.

THE SPIRIT OF PRIDE.

The name of Agag is next significant. It is from the root *hak*, which is a generic term denoting, like Pharaoh, "a ruler." It literally means "ruler," and represents the spirit of self-will, self-assertion and independence in the human heart. Its prototype is Lucifer, the prince of light and glory, who, being lifted up with pride and refusing to be controlled, turned from an angel to a fiend, and has become the desperate leader of the rebellious hosts of hell. We see it next in the supreme temptation of the Fall—"Ye shall be as gods"—the desire for supremacy. We see it in the spirit of human ambition, in the Oriental despot, in the world conqueror, in the society belle and the political "boss." All belong to the same family. They are of the race of Amalek

and the house of Agag. Their cry is like the prodigal's, " 'Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me,' and let me go away from paternal control and do as I please."

There is no country where it is so rampant as our own. It appears to us as young manishness and calls itself liberty, but its end is lawlessness and that lawless one who is yet to embody the combined elements of human wickedness and pride, and end the present dispensation by defying God and man, and perishing, like his father, the devil, in his presumptuous pride. This spirit is found in every human heart. It may be disguised in many insidious forms. It may call itself by illustrious names, and ape the highest ambitions and the noblest pretensions, but it is Agag and Satan every time. The thing in you that wants to rule, wants to have its own way, to be independent, to refuse control, to despise reproof, is wrong in its very nature. The very first thing you need in order to be of any use anywhere is to be thoroughly broken, completely subjected and utterly crucified in the very core and center of your will. Then you will accept

discipline and learn to yield and obey in matters in themselves right, and your will will be so merged in His that He can use you as a flexible and perfectly adjusted instrument, to will only what God wills, and choose only what God chooses for you.

This is the real battle ground of human salvation; this is the Waterloo of every soul; this is the test question of every redeemed life. This was the point where Saul lost his kingdom and Agag lost his life, and where still the eternal destinies are lost or won as we learn the lesson or refuse to be led in triumph by our conquering Lord.

Beloved, let us mark it well. Let us not miss the warning. Let us remember forever that no man can rule others until he himself is absolutely led of God, that no man can conquer foes until he first is conquered, that no man can lead in triumph the hosts of evil or the hearts of men until he himself is led in triumph, the willing captive of the Saviour's love and Master's will.

THE FLESH MUST DIE.

The decree of extermination. God has de-

terminated that the race of Amalek and the house of Agag should be utterly exterminated. They were not to be spared, but to be destroyed. It was a case of no compromise. There was nothing good in them. The least element of Agagism was destructive, and the whole community, with all their goods and belongings, must be put out of existence, just as the effects of a household where some have died of contagious disease must be wholly given to the flames. Now, this is God's decree against the flesh in us. It cannot be cleansed. It cannot be improved. It cannot be cultivated. It cannot be educated into ideas and principles. It must be exterminated.

Now, let us next inquire, What is the flesh? Is it the bad principle in man? Is it some outward or inward evil which can be cut away like a tumor by a surgical operation? Listen: "The carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be. So, then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God." There is the uncompromising decree of the total depravity and the hopeless condition of the flesh. But now what

is the flesh? Listen again: "But ye are not in the flesh if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." There is the distinction clear as a ray of celestial light. Every man who has not the Spirit of God is in the flesh, therefore, everything outside the Spirit of God is flesh. Therefore the flesh is not simply the sinful part of human nature, but the whole human nature. It is the Adam race. It is the natural man. It is the whole creature, and the whole thing is corrupt and polluted. The tree is so crooked you cannot straighten it without cutting it in two. The tumor is so interwoven with the flesh that you cannot cut it without killing the man. There is no remedy. There is no hope. The old life must be laid down and the new creation, wholly born out of heaven and baptized with the Spirit of God, must take its place as a resurrected life, as a new creation, as an experience so supernatural and divine that its possessor can truly say, "I am no longer the former man, I have died and Christ has taken my place. It is no longer I, but Christ that liveth in me." Beloved, don't try to sanctify the flesh. Slay it.

Don't attempt to evolutionize the kingdom of heaven out of the kingdom of hell. It is not evolution, it is creation. It is not morals or manners, it is a miracle of grace and power. Take no risks upon the old man. He will fail you every time. You may think your trained hawk is a dove, but in an unsuspecting moment its beak will be buried in your flesh. Your little wolf may have all the manners of the lamb, but in an evil hour it will destroy all your lambs and perhaps rend you limb from limb. It is hopeless, eternally corrupt. It cannot please God. It must be utterly dethroned, renounced and crucified with Christ.

COMPROMISE.

We see next the attempt of man to compromise with the flesh and to disregard this divine decree of its extermination. Saul spared Agag that he might grace his triumph, and he kept the best of the spoil that he might sacrifice unto the Lord his God. He obeyed the commandment of the Lord to a certain extent. He defeated Amalek and destroyed the nation in a sense. He did all God told him

as far as it was agreeable and he took his own way just where it was pleasant. His obedience, therefore, was not really obedience to God, but truly self-will. He retained just enough of the flesh to destroy the whole service. The very essence of the command was extermination, and the very essence of the disobedience was compromise. The very worst thing about it was that he tried to put the evil to a good use. It was a very insult in the face of heaven to bring the forbidden thing and offer it to the God he had defied. Now this is just the spirit of modern religious culture. Don't go too far. Don't be extreme. Don't be puritanical. Go easy. Be liberal. Meet the world half way. Marry that scoundrel to save him. Take that saloonkeeper into the church because you can make good use of his money. Put that brazen-faced woman up in the choir because she will draw her theatrical set to hear her sing. Go to the theater and the play with your husband to get him to go to church with you on Sunday.

Nonsense. In the first place in such an unequal contest on the enemy's ground the devil

will always get the best of you, and instead of being saved the husband will drag to his level the woman that ventured on forbidden ground. The operatic singer, instead of bringing her set under the influence of religion, will bring the church to the level of her set and turn it into a club-house and a concert-room. The saloon keeper's money will moderate the tone of the preaching so that it will be a comfort unto Sodom, and vice and sin can sit unchecked and even count itself a pillar of the cause of Christ.

Think you that God will accept such service? Will He who owns the treasures of the universe and could create a mountain or a mine of gold in a moment, could send a thousand angels to sing in His sanctuaries, will He accept the money that is stained with the blood of souls and polluted with the filth of de-throned purity and honor? Will He accept the meretricious service that is sold for sordid gain? Will He go begging to the devil's shrine and ask his permission to let go his captives that they may be saved? Shame upon our unfaithfulness and our compromise! Oh, for the sword of a Samuel to hew to pieces the

compromises that are an offence to heaven and a disgrace to the Bride of the Lamb!

PLEADS FOR ITS LIFE.

We see the fawning pleading of the flesh for indulgence. Agag came forth, walking delicately, mincing like a silly, coquettish girl, smiling, seeking by her blandishments to disarm opposition, to win favor, looking like an incarnation of gentleness and innocence. A perfect gentleman. Surely, he could not harm a child! Surely, no one could dream of doing him harm! Ah, that is the old flesh pleading for his life, pointing out its refinement, its culture, its graces, the good that it is doing and wants to do, its claim upon your consideration and regard. It will decorate your church with the finest taste; it will sing in your choirs with all the harmonies of classical music and attract crowds; it will bring society to your church; it will give you a bright and liberal theology. It is full of humanitarian plans for the relief of the suffering and the uplifting of degradation, and it offers you a Pullman palace car prepaid to the gates of heaven.

Surely, such a beautiful, gentle creature

should not be rudely slain. But back of all its disguises and fawnings the Holy Ghost will show you, if you will let Him, the serpent's coil, the dragon's voice and the festering corpse of the charnel house.

Death is not always repulsive at the first sight. The daughter of Jairus was beautiful in her shroud, and a flush of life still lingered on her cheek, but she was as dead as Lazarus festering in his tomb. And so that sweet-faced girl, with her fawning charms, that brilliant minister with his intellectual sophistries, that voice that sings like an angel in the choir, is as corrupt and polluted as that poor creature that lies in yonder hospital dropping to pieces in the last stages of corruption, or that red-handed assassin reeking with the blood of his victim. They are both flesh, only at different stages of their moral putrefaction.

COUNTERFEITED CROSSES.

We see in Agag the flesh feigning death. "Surely," said Agag, "the bitterness of death is past." And so you will find plenty of people in pulpits and pews, on platforms and in obscure corners, who would make you believe

that they are utterly dead and yet who remind you when you get a good look at them of corpses walking around in their grave clothes. They are so conscious of their deadness that you know they are alive. They are so proud of their humility that you would rather they were proud than humble. They are so constantly in their own shadow that they try you by their religious egotism. Surely, dead people don't know it, don't think about it, are unostentatious, unobstructive, modest, simple, natural, free and, like good water, without taste, color or consciousness. Oh, for this blessed simplicity and this place of self-forgetting rest! Oh, for this fulfilment of the prayer, "Lord, let me die so dead that I won't know it."

Beloved, there is no danger so great, especially among Christians somewhat advanced, as that of counting ourselves in a place where we really do not live. There is nothing so hardening to the heart as to take the place of self-surrender and then live a life of self-indulgence, self-will and adding to it the greater fault of self-complacency; calling things holy

which are not, bringing the standard down to our own experience and filling ourselves with a self-complacent dream. Truly, we are to reckon that we are dead indeed, but we are to reckon that we are indeed dead. We are not to reckon that we are reckoned dead, but we are to reckon on a reality and we are to insist upon it and take nothing less from God or from ourselves. Oh, that we would dare to call things by their right names and accept no counterfeit even from ourselves.

GOD'S SWORD.

We see self exposed and slain. Agag could not deceive Samuel. The old man pierces him through with one glance of the Holy Ghost, and looking at his mincing, fawning figure, we can imagine him saying, "I know you with all your fawning. You are an old murderer. You are a selfish, cruel tyrant. Your sword has made many a mother childless, many an innocent victim has been crushed beneath your lust or hate, and back of all your smiles there is a skeleton and a serpent's sting." And then with that sharp sword he cut through his blandishments and hewed him to pieces.

A notorious woman, who was once the star of the vaudeville stage, had in her rôle a hideous song in which one verse may be translated, "Go bring thy mother's heart to feed my dog." It is a true picture of that diabolical selfishness that seeks to hold the very soul of her idolatrous admirer in her power, that can even make him rend his loving mother's heart to please his devilish mistress. That is the skeleton back of the society queen. That is the serpent coiled around the heart of beauty and pride.

You say, "That is the darkest and worst picture." Ah, sin never stops till it reaches its worst, and God shows us in a single sample the possibilities of the evil to which the tiniest seed and fairest bud of selfishness may yet ripen.

Beloved, let us ask God to expose it in our hearts. Let us open our being to the sword of Samuel, which is just the sword of the Holy Ghost. It is described in the Epistle to the Hebrews in these solemn, searching, but blessed words, "The Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword,

piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

All that we need, to be delivered from any form of self and sin, is to really be willing to see it, to recognize it, to call it by its right name, to throw off its disguise, to brand it with its true character, to pass sentence of death upon it, to stand to the sentence without compromise, to consent to no reprieve, to give God the right to slay it, and then there is power enough in the sword of the Spirit, in the fire of the Holy Ghost, in the blood of Calvary, in the faithfulness and love and grace of God to make us dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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